SHORT STORIES

No. 807.] Week Ending June 18, 1904. [Price One Penny.

Next Tuesday this paper will appear under the title of SMITH'S WEEKLY. The paper will be built up on quite new and popular lines. It will contain a complete novelette of some ten or twelve thousand words in length. These novelettes will be written each week by popular authors.

At least a dozen capital articles will be found in the paper, each one of interest and written by an expert writer. A new feature will be introduced under the title of QUIET THOUGHTS FOR SUNDAY, and will contain the brightest bits from the brightest of the Sunday journals.

Besides this, there will be a big competition in which £500 and a huge number of beautiful silver brooches are offered in prizes to readers.

Finally, we come to the serial story written by Arthur Applin, the famous author of so many great serials, entitled "THE CLATTER OF THE CLOGS." This serial will deal with life in a factory town, and is full of human interest.

Altogether you will find in SMITH'S WEEKLY all you found in SHORT STORIES, with the addition of an enormous amount of general reading matter thrown in free of cost.

Remember that when you go to purchase next week's number of this paper you must ask, not for SHORT STORIES, but for SMITH'S WEEKLY.

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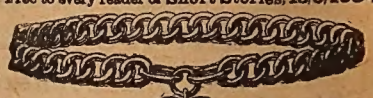

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Don't forget that the title of SHORT STORIES next Tuesday will be SMITH'S WEEKLY.

SHORT STORIES

No. 807.] [ONE PENNY.

Week Ending June 18th, 1904.

The Intervention of "Fluff."

TELLING THE LOVE STORY OF THE MAN WHO WAITED.

"So 'Fluff's' coming home?"

Rachel nodded. "Yes, she has had a long ramble through France, Germany, and Italy, with the Delameres. They have globe-trotted her to death nearly—but I fancy it has done her good. She will be home in time for her nineteenth birthday."

The man who had opened the conversation about "Fluff" was a clean-limbed, typical Britisher. His eyes were blue, his skin healthy, and his mouth well-cut and decided. In age he was nearly forty, though he did not look it, and socially he was the elder son and heir of Sir Charles Hastie—an all-round, good sportsman, a genuine friend—and—the despair of every mother in Society with marriageable daughters. Maurice Hastie was impervious to their wiles, and neither loved nor rode away. People called him at last an "incurable bachelor."

Only Rachel Vanbrugh knew why he had remained so long a bachelor. She herself was the elder daughter of the Vicar of Lullworth, and her beautiful, grave face, with its flashing, sombre eyes of velvet brown, and tender mouth, were enshrined in Maurice Hastie's heart, a talisman against all other charms.

"So you will have 'Fluff' to chaperon now, eh?" he said, after a pause, during which he had flicked carelessly at the long grass at his feet.

"Yes," she replied, with a wistful smile. "'Fluff' is nineteen—she is to come out, and I shall chaperon her."

He frowned. "You only are to blame for that, Rachel," he said quickly. "Years ago I asked you to be my wife, and I ask you again to-day. Darling, will you change your mind, and cease to wait for a man who by this time——" He stopped abruptly, and she finished his sentence with a slight smile—"who by this time has probably forgotten that I *am* waiting for him?"

Then she shook her head. "No, Maurice, I promised Guy Barrington to wait till he returned to England. He said it might be five or seven years before he made his fortune in Australia—but he left me his affianced wife, and he must find me the same when he returns."

He made an impatient movement. "You are too quixotic, Rachel," he said half-tenderly, half-ruefully. "The seven years Guy Vanbrugh prescribed as the limit to the period of waiting, are nearly over—what then? You were young seven years ago, and had hardly seen anything of the world, or of men; the promise you made then may now become a fetter. Suppose," he turned to her suddenly, "suppose you should find Guy Barrington had changed with the years, would it break your heart?"

For a moment she did not reply, then when her answer came it caused the blood in her veins to run riot.

She looked at him, then a slow colour stained her face, lending a deeper glow to her eyes.

"Guy Barrington," she began slowly, twisting and untwisting a spray of lilies in her hand, "took away with him what I thought was my heart—but now I know that it was only that portion of one's heart that is given to an esteemed friend or cousin. It—it would not be damaged if he dropped it."

He caught her hand. "Then—Rachel—your heart—the kernel of your heart—is in *whose* keeping?"

She raised her eyes and looked at him steadily. Her face was very pale now, and when she spoke her voice trembled.

"It is in my own keeping," she said slowly. "In honour bound, it can be in no other now."

"And for the sake of a principle you would spoil not only your own life, but someone else's too," he said bitterly. "You good women are very cruel."

"It is you who are cruel," she answered. "You think only of yourself. You don't consider my position. I want help for I am weak, and it is hard to always put one's chances of happiness on one side, but I gave my word—my honour must at least be clear from contumely—and when Guy Barrington returns, I shall redeem my promise and marry him."

"If he does not return?" he breathed hoarsely.

Her eyes flashed into his with a sudden light. "Then I can give my hand where I have perhaps already given my heart."

He rose and crossed over to her. "Rachel—this must not happen. If only Guy Barrington——"

He stopped suddenly. The maid had come down the steps that led across the lawn to the summer-house, and

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in her hand there was a salver on which two letters lay.

Rachel took them up carelessly, then she started as she looked at the handwriting on one of the envelopes. The letter had been addressed to the old vicarage they had left years ago, and had been forwarded from place to place.

She opened it with trembling fingers, and read the few lines hurriedly.

"My Dearest Rachel," they ran, "*I left Australia by the P. and O. 'Asia,' and as I was seedy I vacated the boat at Marseilles and came on to Nice to recoup. I shall soon, however, be in England, and then shall hope to return to Australia with you as my wife.—With love, yours in great haste,*

"Guy Barrington."

She crushed it in her hand, then glanced at Maurice Hastie. He was pale and his mouth was set in a grim line.

"He is coming back," she said simply. "He is at Nice now. We shall return to Australia when he is better."

He winced. The possessive pronoun hurt him.

"Then I shall go away," he said, after a pause. "I cannot stay here." He took her hand in his. "Tell me, Rachel—must your honour rooted in dishonour stand? Must you marry Guy Barrington?"

She bowed her head. "I must. He has come for me!"

He raised her hand to his lips. "Then good-bye. I shall not see you again."

He turned and walked down the wide velvet lawn, out through the little white gate, and Rachel, standing where he had left her, watched his head disappear over the top of the high hedge that skirted the road. Then she sat down to think. She was a woman of twenty-nine—and she knew that she had sent away her life's happiness for the sake of honour!

Suddenly she remembered the second letter. It was from "Fluff," whose real name was Rosamund, but from her babyhood she had always been "Fluff." Rachel had taken the place of the mother who had died when "Fluff" was a tiny thing, and she regarded the little winsome sister, who was ten years her junior, in the light of a sacred charge from the mother she had adored.

"My Dearest Rachel," "Fluff" wrote, "*We are having such a splendid time here. Nice is filling up now for the carnival season, and everything is very gay. We are going to have a carriage in the procession of the first Battle of Flowers. I wish you were here, dear. Mrs. Delamere has met a lot of friends at the Hôtel des Anglais—one man I specially like. He is a rich Australian squatter, but doesn't look a bit like my idea of a person who 'squats,' being very English, and handsome. I shall come home next month with the Delameres. Give my love to father and Maurice Hastie, if you see him. Your loving,*

"Fluff."

Rachel sighed—then smiled. "Happy 'Fluff'! She has just to gather the rosebuds of life now—the thorns have not yet touched her fingers."

The month had come and gone. "Fluff" was home once more, and after the first flush of sisterly greeting, and the usual flood of rippling nonsense from the younger sister, Rachel noticed a change in her little charge. A change not so much of manner or appearance, but one that left her sometimes pensive when others laughed, or sent a vivid colour into her rose-tinted cheeks at the sudden sight of the letter-bag, leaving it pale again as the petals of a creamy *gloire de dijon*.

Rachel noted all these signs in her little sister, and wondered whether she had left her frivolous, butterfly heart on the Riviera. She hoped not. She was fearful of losing too soon the gay, lovable little creature, whose moods were as variable as an April sky.

Of her own pain she never spoke. Maurice Hastie had left Lullworth, and gone abroad. She had not seen him since that day in the summer-house. And she had not heard again from the man to whom her word was plighted. She did not speak of the letter she had received from Marseilles; her father was ignorant that Guy Barrington was again in Europe, and as for "Fluff," she only knew that for years her sister had been writing letters to a man abroad. She did not even know his name.

The sisters were sitting together one morning when the post came in. "Fluff" sprang up from her chair, and took them in her hand. Her eyes were sparkling and her cheeks flushed.

"Two for you, Rachel—and"—she stopped suddenly, gazing at the third letter with dilated eyes. "I wonder," she said slowly, "is this for you, Rachel—or for me? It is addressed to 'Miss R. Vanburgh,' and has been re-directed from the old vicarage and from auntie's on to here. But the writing seems familiar to me. I thought it might be for—for me."

Rachel rose, and took the letter in her hand; one glance told her that it was from Guy Barrington. He had evidently imagined that she was still in the old vicarage, where they had first become engaged seven years ago.

"It is for me, dear," she replied quietly. "From the man whom I promised to marry when you were a little girl years ago. He is back in England after being away seven years."

"Fluff" buried her face in a vase of deep-crimson roses. "I forgot," she murmured. "What is your *fiancé's* name Rachel? Fancy my not knowing my future brother-in-law's name."

"It is Guy Barrington, dear," Rachel began, opening the letter with reluctant fingers.

A little cry came from the girl bending over the flowers,

"Have you pricked yourself, 'Fluff'?" her sister said absently.

"Fluff" turned a white, quivering face to her. "Yes—only a thorn," she replied, with a faint laugh. "I forgot that such a beautiful thing as a rose had thorns!"

Rachel sighed. A line from some poet ran in her head. "He who wakes to love, must needs wake to pain." Surely she had met both the rose and the thorn in *her* love! And perhaps even little "Fluff." She glanced up quickly, but "Fluff" had vanished.

The letter she had received from Guy Barrington informed her that he would be with her the following evening to dinner. So it was with a sense of reluctance that she wrote, and, at her father's request, invited him to make the vicarage his headquarters while in Lullworth.

When he arrived the following evening, it was the half-hour before dinner, and Rachel, dressed in a gown of crimson chiffon, that made her resemble some graceful lotus flower, waited in the drawing-room to receive him. Her hands were icy cold and she shivered like a criminal in the dock expecting to hear the dreaded sentence. She hated herself for feeling like that, when the poor man who loved her, and who had worked for her sake, was returning to claim only what was legitimately his.

The door opened and the servant announced "Mr. Barrington." A tall, dark man with a brown skin and keen, blue eyes came towards her. "Well, Rachel," he said, when he had touched her cheek with his moustached mouth, "you see I have turned up after all, dear. You have altered a little—not much though," he went on, as though eager to make conversation. "Perhaps a little graver and more dignified—but then we are both getting weighed down by our responsibilities to be too gay."

"Are you better now?" she said quietly. "You don't look as though you had been very ill."

He flushed. "No. I was a bit chippy at first, but then I bucked up wonderfully when I got to the South of France. Met a lot of friends there."

He rose and strolled across to a table, on which stood a lot of photographs. There was the latest of "Fluff" taken at Nice. It was a panel, and she looked a very lovely little Dresden china sort of figure—her yellow hair framing her dainty head like an aureole.

"Who is this?" he said abruptly.

"My little sister 'Fluff,'" she answered. "You will see her at dinner."

He put the photograph back silently, and when he spoke again it was in a preoccupied manner.

At dinner, a message came from "Fluff's" room to say she had

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a bad headache, and wished to be excused, and Rachel missed the bright, racy chatter of her little sister.

The following morning she was not present when "Fluff" met Mr. Barrington, but was pained and surprised to see that, as the days went on, "Fluff" grew paler and thinner, and Guy Barrington moody and taciturn. She was sorry they did not seem to hit it off. She had hoped that "Fluff" would have helped her with her burden of entertaining, but since they seemed to shun each other's society, the effort of appearing bright and sociable fell upon her own shoulders. And it was a burden heavier than she had anticipated, for she was informed by a friend that the rumour was going about that at last Maurice Hastie had become a convert to the fascinations of femininity, and was shortly to be married to an American beauty whom he had met abroad. Though it was ignoble to resent his finding happiness elsewhere, while she could never be anything to him, yet she felt a twinge of pain shoot through her, as she thought of that other woman being the wife of the man she loved — yes — loved — while her word was given to another.

It was one morning in such a mood that she sought the quiet of the summer-house, where Maurice Hastie had said "Good-bye!" She had left her future husband writing letters, and "Fluff" of late had been strangely prone to seeking solitude.

As she sat thinking on the events of the past few weeks, voices at the back of the summer-house roused her from her reverie. They were those of Guy Barrington and "Fluff."

She rose to call them, then a word fell on her ears, freezing the blood in her veins, and making her powerless to move.

"Darling," said the voice of her affianced husband, in tones of passionate love, such as she had never heard from him, even in the early days of their engagement. "This *can't* go on 'Fluff,' sweetheart! How did I know that *she* was your sister when we met at Nice? The similarity of the names did not even strike me. I met you and loved you at first sight. I could not help it—it just came to me, and I forgot Rachel till afterwards, when it was too late. I loved you, and you only, desperately, passionately!"

"Hush," said the low, sobbing tones of "Fluff's" pretty voice, "you have no right to speak like that. It was a cruel mistake that we met; we must forget it, that's all. Rachel loves you—and trusts in your honour. You must not betray her! We must forget everything!"

"And you?" said the man. "Are you to be sacrificed, 'Fluff,' to an empty principle?"

The listening woman in the summer-house started. Those were the very words that Maurice Hastie had said to her, "An empty principle." And now another man—her future husband—was saying them to her sister!

"I shall go away," answered "Fluff" unsteadily, "when you and Rachel are married."

"Oh, sweetheart!" groaned the man, and then Rachel softly left the summer-house, and made her way to her bedroom. She could not listen to any more. The words of love she had heard burnt into her brain, and seared her heart with the rod of humiliation. For this—she thought bitterly, she had flung away the substance for the shadow! In sticking to a principle she had brought misery upon four people—Maurice Hastie, Barrington, "Fluff,"—and —herself. They were all victims beneath the Juggernaut of "Honour." And now the only thing "Honour" could do was to let her at least make two of the victims happy!

After dinner—at which meal "Fluff" did not appear, and Barrington forced himself to make conversation—Rachel said:

"I want to have a chat with you, Guy; come into the library."

He followed slowly, listening for the sound of another skirt, the thrill of another voice.

Maurice peered through the French windows and saw Rachel looking infinitely weary and sad.

Rachel faced him calmly. "I have been thinking," she said slowly, "that the years have changed us both, Guy. And what we fancied love was only the attraction of propinquity. I want you to let me give you back this ring—I think it will fit someone else."

"What is the meaning of this, Rachel?" he said unsteadily. "What do you know?"

"Enough to be quite sure that our marriage would be a great mistake," she answered quietly. "I think you would fail in making me happy, but would succeed with—'Fluff.'"

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"Rachel!" he broke in hoarsely, "you must think me a blackguard."

She smiled. "No, only very foolish not to have been quite frank with me. It would have spared a great deal of pain that cannot be undone."

He flashed a keen glance at her. Somehow her dark, southern beauty had never appeared so alluring. "This will not hurt you, Rachel?" he said quickly. "There is someone else——"

"There is no one else—now," she answered, then added quickly, "now go to the drawing-room; you will find 'Fluff' waiting."

With a shame-faced air, yet a gladness in his eyes, he stole out of the room, and Rachel was left alone.

Six months later a tall, tanned Englishman turned into the Hotel Paris at Monte Carlo. He engaged a room, then scribbled his name in the visitors' book. As his eyes scanned the page before him, they fell upon a name that sent the blood throbbing through his veins, and left even his lips pale. The name was "Mr. and Mrs. Guy Barrington," and maid.

That was all, yet the sight of that simple announcement was an unexpected blow. He had heard of the marriage of the Rev. Cyril Vanbrugh's daughter, but had read no more, and after wandering from place to place, had come to Monte Carlo to dispel his thoughts at the tables.

"Rachel here," he muttered. "I can't stay and meet her. I dare not. It would undo all the good resolutions I have made, and I should forget everything except my love for her. I must get away as soon as possible, and put the seas between us."

Old Sir Charles had died only two months before, and now Maurice was "Sir Maurice Hastie," but his accession to wealth and position had not driven from his memory the vision of that proud, beautiful woman whose lofty ideals had sent him from her side. He wondered feverishly whether she ever thought of him! Whether, as "Mrs. Guy Barrington," she remembered him—the lonely man—sacrificed for honour; a mistaken sense of honour, while she had lent herself to a loveless marriage!

He played recklessly at the roulette table, and curious eyes watched him, as his very recklessness seemed to bring him good luck, and a few superstitious *habitues* began to place their money on his number.

Suddenly a voice—a clear, girlish voice—fell upon his ears.

"Maurice—you here! Oh, I am glad to meet you!"

He turned quickly and looked down into the fair, fragile loveliness of "Fluff"—Rachel's sister.

"Why, 'Fluff,'" he stammered, "I am surprised to see you—are you—are you with your sister?"

She stole a quick glance at him. "No, I am with someone else," she answered demurely. "You have not congratulated me yet."

"On what?"

"Why—my marriage!" she exclaimed, in surprise. "I am Mrs. Guy Barrington!"

A light seemed to dance before Maurice's eyes, and a thousand drums to beat in his ears.

"You—you!" he said hoarsely. "Why—then—where is Rachel? What does this mean?" he stammered.

"Rachel found out that Guy and I loved each other," "Fluff" said softly, "and not loving him herself, she gave him to me. She was noble and self-sacrificing, and—and"—she whispered suddenly—"I want to do her a good turn, Maurice—I have learnt a lot since then. She thinks you are engaged—we were told so—but I know you are not so, just hurry back as fast as you can, and make Rachel Lady Hastie!"

"I engaged?" he said. "Why I only loved Rachel—no one else."

"Then go and tell her so," she retorted. "She's longing to hear it!"

He took her hand in his.

"'Fluff,' if this place were not what it is, I would take the kiss I missed on your wedding-day."

* * * * *

Within twenty-four hours Maurice was again in England. He arrived at the vicarage one evening, just before the blinds were drawn in the drawing-room. He paused outside the long French windows, and saw Rachel alone, and looking infinitely weary and sad. His heart contracted. He—he—was the cause of that sadness.

He pushed the window softly; it yielded, and he stood in the room.

"Rachel," he whispered. "Sweetheart! I have come back!"

She turned startled eyes upon him—her colour paling with terror.

"What do you mean?" she faltered. "You must not come here, Maurice—*you* are bound now."

"No—no—that is all false," he answered quickly. "There is no barrier between us, beloved—I have come to you for my reward!"

He drew her into his arms and kissed her.

"For seven years Jacob served for *his* Rachel," he whispered. "How long must *I* serve for mine? Not twice seven, darling. I have done that already."

She raised her face to his.

"Just so long as you wish, Maurice."

Blanche Eardley.

. . READ "YOUR EDITOR CHATS" ON PAGE 783 . .

FOR FULL PARTICULARS ABOUT THE SPLENDID NEW PAPER "SMITH'S WEEKLY."

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THE - - - BLIND ARTIST.

Telling of the Frightful Revenge He Contemplated, and of the Manner in which He was Frustrated.

"WILL someone be good enough to take me across the road?"

The question was asked near one of the great London thoroughfares, and the speaker was a tall, well-set-up man whose most striking feature was his freely-growing grey beard; in his right hand he carried a stout stick, and one glance at his face was sufficient to show that he was totally blind.

"Yes, certainly; take my arm," replied a fresh-looking young girl, transferring the portfolio she carried to her left hand as she spoke.

The blind man started a little, then took her arm and submitted to her leading him across the busy street.

"Thanks," he said, when they reached the kerbstone.

"Oh, don't mention it," she said brightly, and was going on when he stopped her by a question.

"One moment, if you can spare it. What is your name?"

"Evelyn Grey," she replied, willing to humour one so afflicted, strange though the inquiry might be.

"Evelyn Grey," he repeated slowly. "And are you very busy just now, Evelyn Grey?"

"Not very."

"Not too busy to walk with me a hundred yards to where I live in Sandport Street?"

Evelyn considered. It was an odd demand on so short an acquaintance; indeed, the whole thing was as curious an experience as she had had, but the place he mentioned was much frequented, and there seemed no harm in gratifying his whim. She consented to accompany him if it would give him any pleasure.

Accordingly they walked on together, the blind man tapping the pavement kerb with his stick as they went.

"You are quite young, by your voice," he observed, "and I so seldom fall in with young people that their presence affords me great pleasure."

They talked for the remainder of the short distance on indifferent subjects. Presently the blind man stopped at what appeared to be his own door. He lifted his broad-brimmed felt hat very courteously and thanked her again for her kindness.

"I daresay we shall meet again sometime," she said as she took her leave; "I live near here myself."

"I hope that may be the case, and that if you should see me—you have the advantage of me there, you know—you will not fail to speak to me."

She promised him and went on home, feeling peculiarly happy under the consciousness of having performed a kind action.

Meanwhile the blind man mounted the stairs to his lodgings with an ease born of long habit. He seated himself in an armchair, rested his head on his two hands, and heaved a deep sigh.

"At last!" he murmured. "After I had given up all hope, spent all I could possibly afford; and now, by sheer chance, the game falls into my hands. From to-day I can order things as I wish. I must think. It won't do to bungle it now. One thing is clear, I must have another interview. I think I can count upon that; she's young, she will rejoice in the idea of doing good to a poor blind wretch—ha! ha!" He laughed mirthlessly, and the sound was not pleasant to hear. "She'll come again, she'll come again; I'd have frightened her if I had asked more questions, or I'd have liked to learn more. Never mind." Here he rose from his seat and leant against the chimney-piece. Anyone coming into the room would have said he was looking at his own reflection in the glass above it. He passed his hand across the mirror and continued his monologue in an undertone.

"There you are, Alphonse Gerard, there you are, though these eyes cannot see you. Much changed you must be since I last saw you in a looking-glass. Your hair is nearly white, they say, and your face is lined with twenty years' suffering—mental and physical suffering. Suffer you must, my friend, till the end of your days, but those who made you suffer shall not escape, long though they have eluded me. Take comfort, Alphonse Gerard."

Two days after Evelyn Grey was in the park when her new acquaintance passed quite close to her. She called out "Good morning," in her cheery way; and the blind man turned, came up to the seat where she was taking a short rest and sat down upon it.

"This is kind of you," he said, removing the felt hat.

"Only the terms of the compact," she replied. "Do you often walk here?"

"Very often. I like to hear the trees rustle and the birds chirping in them. I wish they let us walk on the grass. I can't see it, but I should like to feel it under my feet."

She looked at him with intense pity in her big blue eyes. "And to think that is all you have of these things," she said, half to herself.

"That's all; but this is a depressing subject. Let us talk of something else. Tell me what you do all day."

"I paint as long as it is daylight, and in the evening I draw."

"Oh, you are an artist, I perceive."

"Trying to be one, that is all. I came to London a few months ago to study."

"Do you live alone in London? Surely you are rather young for [illegible]?"

"I'm nearly twenty," she said, laughing.

"Not more? It's too young, I say."

"But I don't live alone; I live with my cousin near the Art School. We share rooms; she is a great deal older than I am; but we get on very well together."

"What made you think of being an artist? Have you to get your living?"

"I expect I shall have to some day, but I'm afraid I shall never paint well enough for that. My mother is down in the country; she is a nurse and her present case is away in Devon."

"And your father?"

"He was an artist, too, but he died many years ago. And I cannot let mother work to keep me for ever, you see."

"I wish I could see some of your painting, I should soon be able to tell," he murmured; "but there, it is useless to talk of it."

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"Do you—used you to paint?" asked the girl earnestly.

"I was an artist when I was your age."

"An artist—and you have lost your eyes!" she cried.

"Yes," he said, "that's the story. *You* can see these trees, these colours, these lights and shades, shapes and forms; you live by the sight of them as I did once; while I—well, you see what I am."

"Oh, I *am* sorry for you!" she said, and emboldened by heartfelt sympathy, ventured to lay her hand on his shoulder.

"I think you are; there are tears in your voice," he replied. "But, as I said, it's a depressing subject. My mood is depressing to-day; I have no right to intrude upon you with these things."

"Oh, don't say that," she said. "If you like talking to me, please go on. I should be so glad to help you pass the time if I could."

"You could, indeed, if you chose. Supposing we were to meet here once or twice a week and talk; it would give me the greatest pleasure. Do you think you could manage it?"

"Certainly I could, and I should be delighted."

Thus the acquaintance grew and strengthened. They met at least twice a week, and had half an hour's conversation. Alphonse Gerard's great desire seemed to be to talk of art. He made his young companion tell him all she could about the latest pictures, the latest gossip, the latest developments in the artistic world; and if she sometimes, in giving a glowing account of some sketch or painting, checked her enthusiasm through fear of paining him, he always encouraged her to go on.

Thus passed some weeks, and then Gerard found the seat empty several days in succession. He wondered what the reason of it could be, and at last one day, hearing Evelyn's step on the gravel, he went to meet her.

"I fear you must have been ill, Miss Grey," he said.

"Because I have not been here lately. No, I have been quite well, thank you. I——"

"Something has happened to keep you indoors; of course I cannot expect you should be constantly coming here on my account. But, indeed, I have missed you sorely."

"I am very sorry, but—— Let us sit down for a little and talk. I want so much to tell you about my new picture. I really do think it is going to be a success this time."

"I hardly think it will be wise to sit now, it is getting late for sitting out of doors; suppose we walk about and discuss it."

She was quite willing, for the day was inclined to be misty and raw, being late autumn. Up and down they walked for a considerable time, and then Evelyn said:

"Well, I think I must be getting home; it is getting so foggy."

"They tell me fog is predicted in the forecast for to-day," said Gerard. "Does it seem to you to be getting thick?"

"Very," she replied. "I was so interested in what I was saying I hardly noticed it. I am not quite sure really which way the gate is. We have turned round so many times."

"Is it as bad as all that?" he said kindly. "Well, I think we shall find this the right way."

They reached the gate, the fog thickening every moment. In the streets the lamps were lighted, but they made scarcely any impression, and the traffic was completely disorganised. Evelyn turned to her companion, who alone seemed unconcerned.

"What shall I do, Mr. Gerard? I don't know how I shall ever find the way home."

"Suppose you trust yourself to me. I shall be able to get you there all right. We blind men don't mind the fog, you know."

"Oh, it would be kind of you; I really am frightened. Will it put you out much?"

"Not at all. This will be the way. Now, keep close to me and don't lose sight of me, or we shall never find each other again."

With sure and firm step did Alphonse Gerard thread his way through the maze of streets, the only man collected and calm in the desperate confusion that reigned all over that quarter of London. In complete confidence the girl followed him. It seemed to her that the way was long, yet she never for a moment doubted but that she was being led aright.

He asked the number of her house as they turned down one street; she told him. He went a few steps farther and turned deliberately up a flight of steps leading to a front door. Evelyn followed him up. The steps seemed unfamiliar, but the fog and darkness rendered everything strange. The door opened, a strong hand was laid on her shoulder, and before she had time to grasp what was taking place she was forced into the house and the door fell to heavily behind her.

She was in darkness, utter darkness; not a streak or point of light was visible. Her eyes tried vainly to pierce the gloom in order to catch the outline of some familiar object.

"Where am I?" she asked, a sensation of terror coming over her.

"You will learn soon. Come this way," replied the voice of her guide; and the strong hand was laid on her again. Convinced that something was wrong, the girl tried to slip from under it and reach the door; but the darkness confused her so hopelessly that escape was impossible. She cried out; her pitiful cry echoed noisily through the house, and by her side she heard a harsh, mirthless laugh.

"No use, my dear; no one will hear you. The place is empty and the walls are thick. Better come quietly. Give me your hand."

"But what does it all mean? What do you want with me?"

"That you are shortly going to hear. Come this way."

The hand caught her wrist; helplessly she followed through the darkness up the stairs, her companion leading the way without hesitation. They stopped on the next landing, paused before a door, as she guessed; he opened it and led her through it.

"There's a chair for you; sit down," he said, and put her down into an armchair as he spoke. Immediately afterwards she heard the key turn in the lock. She was now thoroughly frightened, but made an effort to keep collected; perchance, she might still get away.

"Well, and how do you like the darkness?" asked the blind man.

"I expect I shall get used to it presently. Are there no means of lighting this place?"

"None. There is a gas fitting, but the gas has been disconnected. You may as well begin to accustom yourself to darkness as soon as you can, for you've seen the last of light in this world."

"What *do* you mean?" she asked, trying to keep her voice steady.

"You'll see presently. Now I am going to tell you a story." As far as she could judge he seated himself as he spoke. "It's an old story, it began more than twenty years ago. In those days I was a student living in the Latin Quarter of Paris. I had life before me, and talent to develop, a brilliant career was predicted for me.

"One day a woman arrived in our midst. She was an English student, her name was Evelyn Collet. I don't know how old she was, or what her position might have been; all I can tell you about her was that she was the most beautiful creature I had ever looked upon, and that we one and all worshipped her. I can see her now," his voice softened as he went on, "with hair like burnished gold, movements as graceful as an Arab's, and a face, well, indescribable in words, walking amongst us like an empress among her slaves. For she evinced no interest in any one of us with the exception of me, and that, I now believe, solely because I painted better than the others. Still I was flattered, and cherished hopes of one day making this beautiful, inaccessible being my own.

"Soon after there was another new-comer who was destined to have a great influence on my life. This was a young student, also English, by name Wilfred Grey. His talent soon bid fair to rival mine, and he was likewise intimate with Evelyn Collet. Whether she was a consummate coquette, or whether she really did not care one way or the other, I never knew, but she divided her attention between Grey and

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myself with wonderful impartiality, disregarding everyone else.

"Now, that year Grey and I were both going in for the Nemo prize of two thousand francs. Others were entering for it too, but it really lay between us. Both of us were hard up and anxious for the money as well as the glory. We worked assiduously at our rival pictures, and being fairly intimate through our mutual acquaintance with Evelyn Collet, sometimes showed each other the progress we were making.

"One day, very shortly before the competition, I was at Grey's studio and examined his painting. He had chosen a classical subject, mine was an allegorical one. I acknowledged his picture was good and that his chance was excellent, but even while I said so I knew that I must beat him. Fool that I was, I asked him to come to my studio and inspect my attempt. He willingly did so. My painting was not so far advanced as his, yet it was sufficiently so to startle him by its promise alone. I remember how he looked into it, silently and regretfully, even though he could not but praise it. This was pretty late in the day and there was no light to get on with the work that evening. We spent the time in the usual manner and something past midnight I got to bed.

"And now it is difficult to explain to you what happened next, though it is most essential that you should understand it. I passed a night of such intense agony that I shudder to think of it to this day. Intense, scorching, racking pain in my eyes as if they were being burnt out, and I could not move! I simply had to lie in dull agony, unable to cry out, to lift myself up, alive to nothing but the most frightful suffering. And when at last motion returned and I could turn and moan in my pain, I found myself—*in darkness!* My sight was gone.

"I felt terribly ill and weak, and there was a strange and unusual smell in the room, as of some potent drug. I was only half in my senses, and allowed myself to be removed to the hospital without any protest; my pain was so acute I could not even think. I remained for some time in the hospital, and was cured, as far as could be, of my injuries; till at last one day I walked forth to face the world again—a blind artist!"

There was a pause. Then the speaker suddenly gave vent to something like a cry.

"Child, do you know what it means to lose your eyes! Do you know what it means to love all things seen, to live in that love, and to have it taken from you! To have all that makes life worth living taken away and know it is for ever! To be imprisoned in darkness when it is your nature to worship light! But no, of course you can have no idea of any such thing. Let me go on.

"I soon found that Grey had won the Nemo prize, left the Latin Quarter, and gone they knew not where. Evelyn Collet had gone with him. I had been discovered late one morning several weeks ago, just recovering from the effects of chloroform, under the influence of which I had been blinded with sulphuric acid. Who had done the deed the police had not been able to trace. The incentive which Grey had for it was all they could go upon, and he proved beyond a doubt that he could not have done it. But upon Evelyn Collet there fell no suspicion, except mine. There was but one possible conclusion, namely, that he had told her he had no chance against my picture, and with or without his help and connivance, she had done this thing.

"But for her sake, because I had not yet got over my infatuation, I made no further attempt to find them. I resigned myself to my fate, and Providence sent me a friend. When I was still comparatively prosperous I had been acquainted with a little seamstress, who always went by the name of Mimi. She was the plainest woman I ever came across, even French taste could not redeem her. I once saw her in Evelyn's company, I never shall forget the contrast. Well, this little woman came to me in my trouble and offered to devote herself to me. Helpless as I was and unable to work, I accepted her offer, which she put as a petition, and from that day forward I verily believe she thought of me before everything. She worked like a slave, poor little woman, to keep herself and me; and, strange though it may sound, we were happy together. She became all in all to me, and I know I was the same to her. After a time she had an offer to come over to work in an English house, and things being bad with us just then, she accepted. We came to London. Here we lived for some months, and then Mimi was taken ill. Her sickness was dangerous and infectious; she was removed to a fever hospital, and there she died.

"Now I was utterly alone again, though not so helpless as heretofore. Soon after her death I inherited a small income, more than sufficient for my wants. But I missed her sorely. And in my loneliness and darkness I fell back upon my past life, and I became filled with one idea, namely to be revenged on those who had taken from me all that made existence worth living.

"I spent a good deal looking for Evelyn Collet and Wilfred Grey, but all to no purpose. Then by accident *you*, their daughter, fell into my hands. You, representing both by your very name, you with Evelyn's voice and Grey's turns of speech, you through whom it is easiest to injure that traitress, your mother, on you shall my vengeance fall! You have heard my story, you know my determination, what do you say to it?"

"I say that you have utterly misjudged both my mother and my dear dead father, and that if you inflict any injury on me you will suffer for it to your life's end!"

"Well spoken, but what proof have you of your words?"

"Only conviction."

"Ah! That is all I have, it wants nothing more. Now, are you ready?"

"What are you going to do with me?"

"What was done to me, exactly as I have told it you."

"To give me chloroform and burn out my eyes!"

"Yes, just as you are getting on with your picture, as I was; just when you want them most. You have seen the last of daylight; when you recover from the sleep you will fall into you will find yourself in darkness blacker than this, darkness that can be indeed felt."

"Oh, you cannot mean it," she wailed piteously, her courage forsaking her. "Oh, Mr. Gerard, what harm have *I* done you; I, who only meant to show you kindness? Take pity on me, Mr. Gerard; where are you? Oh, this darkness, if it were not for this darkness perhaps I could do something. What shall I do, what shall I do?"

"Yes, we are on equal terms for once," he said grimly, and she shuddered to hear him approaching her chair. Instinct of preservation made her spring up as he came nearer. A strange scent began to spread itself over the room; deadly terror paralysed her, she shrank back against the wall, fancying for a moment that he had lost any idea of her whereabouts. But at once she knew it was not so, for his steps were coming straight in her direction, the heavy scent increased in strength, in another moment she felt his hand on her shoulder, his breath on her neck, the strong, overpowering drug was close to her nostrils. She put her hand over her face and dropped on her knees.

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"Mr. Gerard, have pity on me!"

For all answer her hands were forced away from her face and the chloroformed handkerchief thrown over it. For a few minutes she struggled faintly, then the drug began to take effect, and very soon she fell senseless on the floor.

He opened the door and stood for a moment in the fresh air of the passage. Then he took a small bottle from his pocket and returned to the room, leaving the door behind him unlocked. It would not be a long business, and as soon as it was done he meant to leave the house with all the doors open, and put himself into safety before she should have regained consciousness and told the story to others.

He knelt down by her on the floor and uncorked the bottle. He knew he must be careful with it. He passed his hand over her face and located her eyes. And then——

There came a sound of footsteps and voices, the door opened violently, and a rush of fresh, if fog-laden air made itself felt as the intruders entered.

Next came the sound of a match being struck, and a woman's voice cried:

"Ah, I am right; look here, doctor."

Gerard rose from his knees and turned instantly in the direction whence the voice had come.

"You, Evelyn!" he cried.

"Yes, I, who have kept a watch on your movements ever since my daughter there told me of her acquaintance with you. I warned her quite lately against having anything more to do with you."

"Is there no light in this place?" said a man's voice impatiently. "Will you take this box of matches, Mrs. Grey, and go and see if you can find light in any of these rooms. I'll stay here."

Mrs. Grey went, and Gerard heard the door locked behind her. The doctor knelt down by the girl without paying any further attention to him. Very soon Mrs. Grey returned and was admitted.

"Do you think she is very bad?" she asked anxiously. "What has he done to her?"

"Given her chloroform, but that is all as far as I can see."

"I've lighted the gas in the room across here; shall I come with you?"

The doctor looked at her and glanced in the direction of Gerard. She saw what he meant and took the key out of the lock. Gerard heard her and laughed.

"Go with your child, Evelyn," he said, "I've no intention of running away."

"I hope not, I want to speak to you."

A look of fleeting surprise passed over his face as he noted the absence of resentment in her tones. He stood with folded arms leaning against the mantelpiece while the girl was removed. After they had gone he slowly and laboriously began to open the shutters of the room. She re-entered while he was doing this, and rolled back one of them for him.

"Can you see now?" he asked, "or is the fog too thick?"

"It is lifting; yes, I can see quite enough. How changed you are, Alphonse!"

He laughed his bitter laugh. "It is appropriate for you to say so," he rejoined. "So you have outwitted me again, as you think?"

"If you mean that I have had you watched so that I knew you had engaged this room in this house, and that you two days ago contrived to buy a certain quantity of chloroform and sulphuric acid, yes, I have. I arrived in London this afternoon and drove straight to my daughter's home. They told me she had been missed for some time, whereupon I engaged a doctor's services, telling him to bring the needful restoratives for chloroform, and drove here. I was only just in time, it seems. She is better now, and the doctor has taken her home."

"And now you are going to have me arrested, I suppose?"

"No, I do not wish to do that," she said thoughtfully, and as she looked at him standing leaning against the mantelpiece, a look of bitter indifference on his face, something like pity was to be read in her eyes. "But I have to disillusion you."

"What about? Ah, you are going to lie to me about the wrong you inflicted on me; well, you can pare yourself the trouble, I cannot see you now, and you cannot deceive me with your angel face."

She said nothing, but sat looking straight in front of her, as if considering something in her mind.

"Whom did you love better in the end, Mimi or I?" she asked.

"The two cases cannot be compared, since you ask the question. But why? Is it anything to do with this matter, beyond the fact that one of you acted like a saint towards me and the other like a fiend?"

"It is everything to do with this matter; and I think, if it were only myself that were concerned, I would let it alone. But there is Evelyn. With a man of your temperament she will never be safe if she should ever cross your path again. No, it must be done. You think I burnt out your eyes."

"I am certain of it."

"It was not I, it was Mimi."

He gave a great start and just caught the table in time to save himself from falling.

"Impossible," he cried. "It is a lie, another of your wicked inventions! She loved me, she could not do it."

"She did it for that very reason. She loved you desperately, and you cared nothing for her. Perhaps if I had never crossed your path she would have let things take their course, but your friendship with me fairly maddened her. Apart from your obvious delight in my society, she realised that as long as you could see there would be no hope that she should win your affection. *I* saw it all though you didn't, but, of course, I never thought she would act as she did. Your eyes were her enemies, and she resolved to be rid of them. Wilfred Grey's picture afforded her an excellent cloak for her machinations. She lived in the same house as you did, and continued to do so after the outrage. She had nerves of iron and the determination of a Bonaparte. Then, when you returned, she repented of her crime, and devoted herself to you for the remainder of her life."

"And how do you know of this?" he asked, and his voice shook.

"I will tell you. After my husband's death I took to sick nursing to earn a livelihood for myself and Evelyn. For a time I was in the fever hospital in which she died. I nursed her and she recognised me. She was sure she would not recover, and she chose to make me the confidante of this story before she died. She feared, knowing your character, that some such thing as this might happen, and she told me this that I might make use of the information if necessary, begging me not to do so unless the necessity was absolute. To make it incontrovertible, I wrote out a statement of the facts, which she signed, and her signature was witnessed. Here it is. You can have it read to you by anyone you please, if you do not believe me."

He shook his head.

"No use," he replied sadly. "My life is done. I have lost my last illusion, through my own fault. I feel you speak the truth.

His trembling hand sought for a chair, fell on the back of one, he sank on to it, and dropped his head on his hands.

There was a short silence. Then he asked wearily:

"What are you going to do next?"

"Next?" she echoed. "Why, what more is there to be done? When it has been proved to you that your resentment was misplaced you will have no further cause for attempting to injure me or Evelyn. That's why I told you."

"Then you don't mean to prosecute me?"

"No. If I had I should have sent for more assistance. There is really no harm done—except to yourself," she said, for the man before her looked so utterly broken down and despairing that she had no heart to reproach him further.

There was silence. Then at last she came near to him.

"Is there nothing I can do to comfort you?" she said.

"Say you forgive me," he murmured.

She took his hand, pushed back his hair from his forehead, and kissed it.

"I forgive you, Alphonse," she said. **Dorothy Riley**

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"BABS."

Relating How Providence, Aided by a Little Girl, Reunited Two Parted Lives.

"I LIKE you," said Babs seriously.

The man to whom the five-year-old girlie said this smiled encouragingly.

"Thank you," he said, equally seriously.

"I will give you a kiss—if you like," said Babs, with just the suspicion of a smile creeping over her baby face. The kiss was at once accepted and given—several times over. "You finded me," said Babs, "when I was lost. And mummy always tells me to be polite."

Gerald Challoner had hard work to keep a smile from coming upon his handsome face; but the little maid was so solemn and so serious that he felt he dared not let her see how amused her dear self-confidence made him.

'So you are home now, Babs, and not lost any longer," he said, "and now we must say 'Good-bye.'"

"Good-bye," said Babs, "and thank you. Mummy always tells me to say 'thank you.'"

"You dear little mite," cried Challoner, bending down to kiss the sweet little upturned baby face yet once again; "I wonder if I shall ever see your dear little face again. It reminds me so strangely of one I once used to know."

But Babs did not hear. She had fled up the garden path of the cottage, and was lost to sight. Challoner closed the wicket gate, and went on his way, musing and trying his best to remember.

It had been a strange meeting, that of Babs and Gerald Challoner. He, on a walking tour, alone, and with knapsack on shoulder, had found Babs sitting by the wayside, with big tears in her baby eyes, and being tenderhearted, had essayed to comfort her. All she could say was that she was lost. But a very brief walk, during part of which Gerald Challoner carried Babs in his arms, contrived to bring the little maid into recognisable regions, and she soon found "home."

"Home" was a tiny little cottage, with a quaint, old-fashioned garden in front, and a wicket gate—the gate through which Babs had run so quickly—and, when the full summer came, the promise of sweet and scented summer roses clambering all about the old-world porch. It was nearly dusk on this June afternoon, but Challoner had both time and opportunity—he made them—to observe the quaintness of the cottage, the white curtains at the windows, and the neatness of the tiny garden.

It is strange sometimes how one's whole life can be affected by a minute's hesitation. Gerald Challoner hesitated quite that space of time outside Vine Cottage, in the centre of the village of Winterton; and all his future life was altered by that sixty seconds of hesitation. Instead of walking on to the town of Stanworth, where he had intended to put up for the night—it was barely two miles further on—he decided, in that minute, to remain, if he could find decent accommodation in the place, in Winterton. Upon such little trifles of decision sometimes do our destinies lie!

Challoner, walking on a little way, came upon the "Green Lion," which offered everything that he desired. A cosy room, a bright and plump landlady, a fire which seemed to suggest ox-roasting, lavender-scented sheets, and a supper that was most welcome, served in an old oak-panelled room, that might have been existent since the days of Cromwell. "Better," thought he, "than the Royal Hotel, beloved of commercial travellers, at Stanworth!" And he felt sincerely obliged to Babs for having detained him on his journey.

Before seeking the lavender-scented sheets, he went into the smoking-room of the "Green Lion," where he speedily made himself very much at home. The worthies of the little village were smoking and drinking in the warmth of a blazing fire, and, though at first a little shy at the intrusion of a stranger into their select village circle, when they discovered that he could tell a good "yarn" and was not averse to being friendly, he was heartily made welcome.

He frankly avowed, even in the portly presence of the landlord, his intention to have gone on to Stanworth; and after certain discussions of purely local interest, in which he was compelled, perforce, to join, he contrived to lead the conversation to other matters.

"It is curious, gentlemen," he said, at last, "but a strange incident has made me a visitor here to-night. I happened to meet with a little maid of five, who lives at Vine Cottage, close at hand, if I remember right; and dusk coming on, she had wandered rather farther than she knew, and was lost."

No one spoke for a few moments. Then the burly landlord took his pipe from his mouth.

"That's Mrs. Summers' little maid," he said.

"She was so tired that I carried her home to the gate of the cottage," went on Challoner, "and then she knew she was at home once more."

Again that strange silence fell upon the room. This time Gerald Challoner noticed it.

"Can anyone tell me," he said, "who her mother is? Is she——"

"Better not ask," interrupted a voice from the far end of the room. It was that of the village schoolmaster and organist. "Nobody knows," he went on, oracularly, "and so far as we're concerned nobody wants to know."

"But I should like to know," said Challoner quietly; "if any of you will tell me." But nobody vouchsafed him a reply, except the burly landlord.

"She came here a twelvemonth ago, took Vine Cottage, and nobody knows where she came from or who she is."

"The vicar don't call on her," said the organist.

"Nor do his wife," chimed in another.

"She's got no friends," said the organist.

"Not in this room," thought Gerald Challoner to himself, and he could not help feeling a strange sort of pity for the mother of Babs.

"But her husband?" he queried.

"Ah!" said the organist. And the simple exclamation conveyed volumes.

"She's a widow woman," said the landlord, in explanation.

"Perhaps," said the organist, unkindly.

* * * * *

Gerald Challoner, barrister, out on a walking tour for the benefit of his health, slept in the lavender-scented sheets at the "Green Lion" splendidly. But his first waking thought in the morning was of Babs and her mother. What did it mean? What was it to him if Mrs.—what was her name?—Summers was looked upon by Winterton village with suspicious eyes and was not even visited by the vicarage people? Personally, Gerald Challoner said to himself it did not matter

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a jot. But all the same, he could not help but confess that he was interested. Of course it was Babs, the dear, sweet little mite—who could help being interested in her! He had fully intended going on his way to Stanworth at nine in the morning, but he did not. Something—he did not know what it was—seemed to persuade him to remain in Winterton—and see Babs again.

* * * * *

Of course he stayed—and he saw "Babs" the very next morning. She was in the garden, and he spoke to her, called her by her name.

The little mite came running to kiss him—it was a happy and pleasant trait in Gerald Challoner's character that all children loved him at first sight.

"Mummy is not well," said Babs most solemnly.

"I am so sorry," said Challoner.

"Is you?"

"Of course I am," responded Gerald, with a smile that he could not quite repress; "I don't like to think that anyone is ever not well."

"You is laughing!" exclaiming the little maid. And forthwith she ran up the garden path and left him. But half a moment later she turned again with a smile on her little face. "Here's mummy!" she said. Hearing voices, "Mummy" had come out, and was standing, a lattice-framed picture, at the threshold of the cottage.

"Come, mummy!" said the little voice. And "Mummy" came down the garden path.

"You!" said Challoner, lifting his hat; "of all people in the world——"

And then he suddenly recollected several things. That he had seen a likeness in Babs' face to someone he had known; that he had been interested in the previous evening's talk about Mrs. Summers; that he had been led somehow to the very garden gate where he was now standing. And his old sweetheart, who had jilted him for a richer man, was facing him!

He put out his hand, and Lucy Summers took it.

The garden gate, closed, was between them. Babs watched most interestedly. Again Challoner was the first to speak.

"You are well and happy?" he said. As he looked at the rounded form and sweet face, he felt in his heart that he had suffered.

"Yes, came the calm reply; "and you?"

"Oh, I am all right now."

It seemed to him that his old sweetheart's eyes looked at him reproachfully.

"I mean," he said, "that I am better off and not so worried by the cares of existence."

"And you forgive me?" murmured Babs' mother, more softly; "you know why I did it?"

"No, I know nothing."

"But surely you heard? My mother was ill, dying, and I—I—what could I do? Stop! Chance has brought this meeting about, and I will tell you, I must tell you, why I——"

"Threw me over!" interpolated Challoner.

"Yes. You had no money, no prospects. Gordon Summers offered to marry me, and take the mother I loved away."

"Please don't be cross wiv him, mummy," said Babs' childish voice, but her mother patted her shoulder with tender fingers.

"There was a hope," she went on. The scent of the early June roses came wafting to him on the summer breeze. Gerald Challoner looked at his old sweetheart's face, and thought—just as one thinks at times in an infinitesimal part of a moment—that she looked sweeter than ever; spiritualised by sorrow, trouble, and the world, and yet more lovely than of old.

"There was a hope," she repeated, "but, alas! a forlorn hope. She died three months after, in Italy."

"I am deeply sorry," said Challoner, "because I loved her. I heard nothing of this. No. one could tell me anything about you, Lucy."

"No one knew. Gordon was very good to me, and—and you know how I loved her"

"I know," said Challoner, simply. At this very moment Babs, who had got tired of listening to what was to her an uninteresting conversation, came dancing up gaily with a rosebud in her tiny hand.

"Flower from garden," she said, with a beaming smile. Gerald Challoner took it from the uplifted baby hand, and slipped it into the button-hole of his coat. He turned to the mother.

"I hope you are happy," he said; "and I am glad to have seen you again. Your little maid, strangely enough, brought us together again. I think, if I go with her rosebud in my coat, it will be a symbol of my forgiveness of any happenings in the past."

"You do forgive me, Gerald?"

"Why not? I could not until I knew, and now that I do know the true reason, I give you my full and complete forgiveness. But—good-bye."

"You do not blame me?"

"How can I—now I know?" He stooped to take Babs' hand in his.

"Is you going?"

"I must, little woman!"

"Oh, please no!"

But Gerald Challoner, with the love of seven years ago surging passionately back into heart and mind and memory, set his teeth and bade himself be strong.

"I must," he said.

"Oh!" And Babs began to wail pitifully; "I wanted you to come and play wiv' me in the garden, and give me swings. Mummy can't, she's so tired, and dere's no one else!"

"Hush, Babs: Mr. Challoner has to go a long way—all the way to London," said the mother.

"London?" said Babs; "is that where daddy is?"

"Perhaps!" answered Babs' mother. Gerald Challoner caught a strange expression upon Lucy's face, and his heart seemed to stand still. What did the word mean? Had Gordon Summers deserted her—and was that the meaning of the village gossip he had heard overnight?

"Did you not know?" she said, turning a strained face to him. The sudden meeting with her old lover had tried her.

"Know what? I know nothing but what you have told me."

"My husband died—three years ago!"

"Then you are alone in the world?"

"Except for Babs."

"Me?" said that youthful person, hearing her name spoken.

"When my husband died," continued her mother, "it was found that he was not so rich after all, and when things were finally wound up, I had about a hundred a year to live upon. So I came here, and have been here over a year—with Babs."

Gerald picked the child up in his strong arms.

"Babs," he said, "would you like to have me ever and always to play with you whenever you wanted me to?"

"Yes," said Babs; "I like you so much."

Gerald Challoner turned with a smile to Babs' mother.

"Shall the angel in a pinafore give your answer for you," he said softly. "I love you as much as ever, Lucy, even more. Will you marry me?"

Lucy Summers looked up in his face lovingly.

"You have forgiven me?" she said.

"I have forgotten," he replied, putting Babs down.

"And I have been so alone, so lonely, in the world!"

"Never again, Lucy," said Gerald Challoner, taking her into his arms, with Babs a highly interested spectator; "never again. Fate, Providence, Chance—never mind which—has brought us together again, sweetheart, and I shall never part with you now."

"It was Fate," murmured Lucy, as her old lover kissed her upon the lips.

"He finded me and brought me home to you," put in Babs.

"I think it was Babs, after all," said Challoner.

Clifton Bingham

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The Keeping of a Promise.

The Story of an Unfaithful Lover and an Inconstant Friend.

THE course of the river was between great hills, whose sides were dotted with villas, while at their feet nestled little hamlets and more pretentious villages. There was one spot at which it broadened into a lake-like expanse, with little inlets where the rushes fringed its edges, and where large, white, odorous lilies floated on its softly undulating waters.

Clarice Reeves always felt grateful that her ancestors had chosen an elevation near this spot to build their home—a great rambling house, with bay windows and terraces overlooking the river, and commanding a view of the country for miles.

"I always thought," she said one morning to Hugh Valincott, who had ridden over to spend an hour on the wide terrace, "that the ideal life was to be lived on an eminence, from which one could see the action and turmoil of the world, and yet not be in it."

"The ideal life for me," he returned, "is—where you are, whether on a hill or in a valley."

And he stopped trailing his whip for the amusement of the leonine-looking poodle, Tiny, and, looking straight into Clarice's eyes, possessed himself of the dainty little hand lying idly on the arm of the chair.

"If I could only be sure!" she said in a half-aside.

"Of what?" he exclaimed. "Of my love?" And again he brought the magnetism of his glance to bear upon her sweet face.

"No," she returned, with a quick, proud little motion of her head; "but sure that the gown I have ordered for the next dance will arrive in due time; sure that Cousin Lucie will be here by the evening train; sure that I shall always have the same relish for chocolates."

Then she daintily treated herself to one from the bon-bon dish on the wicker table, and held out another for Tiny's delectation.

There was an angry flush on Valincott's dark handsome face, and he rose and picked up his gloves and his riding-whip, which he had just dropped.

"One thing I am sure of," he said; "that you have no faith in me."

"'Who never doubted, never half believed?'" she quoted with a tantalising smile

"Clarice," he said, with a little gesture of remonstrance, "do you think you are using me kindly? I came this morning because I could not remain away from you another moment; and yet you treat me only to flouts and jeers. Come into the drawing-room and play for me—my perturbed spirits need soothing."

"As you like," said Clarice; and, with a grave little air of acquiescence, she led the way into the wide hall.

Valincott watched the slight, graceful figure with eager eyes. She wore a simple dress of white, soft cambric and a bunch of cinnamon-pinks was carelessly thrust in her belt.

"A peace-offering," she said, selecting one and giving it to him. "Now, what shall it be?" she asked, seating herself at the piano, after an adroit movement in which she eluded Valincott's too evident intention of beguiling her into the corner of the drawing-room for a lover-like demonstration.

"Whatever pleases you," he replied, with an air of mock resignation; "for you seem not to care to please me much this morning."

"Schumann?" he asked, as she played a soft, dreamy air.

"Yes. Did you ever hear Schumann's music likened to the lace-like network of delicate rootlets?"

"No, I don't think I ever did; I shouldn't have appreciated it if I had. I am not equal to such intricate comparisons. Let me ask you, in turn, if you ever heard your hair compared with a shining, wavy mass of bronze-brown? Or if," and he bent over and put his hand gently under the dimpled chin and raised it a little, and looked into the beautiful hazel eyes, "anyone ever told you that yours were the sweetest eyes ever seen?"

A few moments after Clarice stood watching him ride up the river-road.

"I wish I could be sure," she was again saying wistfully.

"Of what?"

"Oh! is it you, Aunt Amy?" And she turned her lovely perplexed countenance towards a middle-aged woman who had just entered the room. "Why, sure of anything," she continued. "Is there such a thing as certainty? Life, love, friendship, wealth, health, happiness—everything seems unstable to me, this morning."

"Clarice," returned her aunt brusquely, "your liver is out of order. A pill night and morning will rid your mind of such fancies."

"I do not believe there is a woe in the whole world, from a broken heart to the slightest ailment, that you haven't a panacea for in the shape of a pill," laughed Clarice. "And now tell me one thing; do you suppose Lucie will be in the least like I expect?"

"Nothing is as we expect. Sometimes it is better, or—

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sometimes worse," she added sententiously; for, in her inmost heart, Mrs. Reeves—who was Clarice's aunt by marriage, and filled the place of companion and chaperon to the orphan heiress—doubted the wisdom of her niece's latest caprice of sending for an unknown second cousin to spend the summer with her in her country home.

"It will be something for me to do," Clarice had said. "Her life is dull; I will give her a pleasant summer. You say she is pretty, and I am anticipating much pleasure in seeing the dear little rosebud make her *début*."

So she dispatched the invitation, and, when it was accepted, sent a delicately worded letter with a generous cheque; for Lucie Dayton's father was a country clergyman in rather straitened circumstances.

"I was never so surprised," announced Clarice to her aunt the next morning after her cousin's arrival. "My rosebud has resolved itself into some strange tropical flower. Lucie is simply beautiful; she dresses in exquisite taste, and has, although she is barely nineteen, the aplomb of a shining beauty of several seasons. She quite outshines me; but I am delighted with her all the same."

"I am glad you like her," returned her aunt drily.

Two hours later the girls were on the broad terrace; Lucie had been for a short drive with Mrs. Reeves, and was resting for a moment before going to her room.

She had been looking down the river, watching a distant steam-launch and some small boats that were setting sail, but had thrown herself gracefully into a chair, and was contemplating the ranges of hills covered with masses of evergreens, and the fleecy, white clouds which floated across the bright blue sky and seemed entangled among them.

"You like my home?" questioned Clarice eagerly, watching the dreamy, satisfied expression.

"It is Paradise to me—who have spent my days in that little old parsonage, with its barren outlook."

"I am so glad if you are going to be happy here," returned Clarice warmly. "But I beg you to tell me if country clergymen's daughters are usually like you, with your grand air and almost Parisian taste in dress?"

Miss Dayton smiled in a slow, inscrutable manner, which might mean anything or nothing, and said: "It is the Reeves' blood, I suppose; for I certainly haven't acquired a grand air in that remote country village."

So Lucie sat watching the ever changing scene, while Clarice looked at her furtively.

She was tall and slender, and carried herself with exquisite grace; her eyes were velvety black, with delicate arched brows, while her hair was pale golden—a contrast which Clarice thought would lend itself perfectly to some effective costumes she had in mind. For she meant her to be the belle of the next ball and to captivate Doctor Darrell.

Hugh Valincott rode up before Clarice had quite made up her mind about the wonderful gown that was to accomplish so much, and she greeted him warmly; she was so eager to introduce him to her cousin, that she quite forgot the vague doubts of the day before, which all his tender words did not entirely remove, and which had caused her much hurt.

"Now, you two are to be the best friends in the world," she said in her imperious, pretty way. "I want Cousin Lucie to have the happiest summer of her life; and you, Hugh, are to help."

Valincott bowed low over the slim hand in its long, black glove, and looked with admiration at the beautiful, fair face with its soft, black eyes and frame of golden hair.

"If we are going to sit here, I will go for my hat," said Clarice.

"Let me ring for it?" offered Hugh.

"Don't trouble; I have to see Aunty Amy a moment."

"What do you think of her?" she asked, finding her aunt in the pretty morning-room, busy with her knitting. "Isn't she a wonder?" she continued eagerly. "Can you imagine how she made the cheque I sent her go so far? Oh, yes—Hugh is here; I mean to ask him to stay to luncheon."

Mrs. Reeves' nose was aquiline and her features sharp; and she looked unusually grim and forbidding at that moment, when she prepared to sit in judgment on the new cousin.

"Do you know what I think?" she said. "I think," and she spoke the words with deliberation, "that you are laying a scheme to destroy your happiness. I hate to see a person approaching a fuse with a match, when the explosion will involve ruin."

Meantime Hugh, who was never so much at home as when saying soft nothings to a pretty woman, was looking into Lucie's fair face with that air of devotion which made him adored by the sex.

"Of course, I am delighted to know you," she was saying in her low contralto voice. "I have heard your praises so sounded that I regard you already as a perfect model of a man." Then she looked at him with a glance which seemed to say: "And I find you to be all that you were described." While her words left a sound in his ears of Clarice's having talked too readily of her affairs to the new cousin.

Clarice came back, wearing a grey dress and a broad hat.

"I find I have to leave you," she said. "An old lady, in whom I am much interested, has sent for me to write a letter for her."

"Are you the scribe for the indigent old women of the vicinity?" asked Lucie with a little laugh. "Don't you want a secretary?"

"Yes," gaily assented Clarice. "Will you come with me?"

"No, thank you. I have unpacking to do."

"May I come?" asked Hugh.

"Oh, no; you are to stay and talk to Lucie."

"How can he talk to me when I am unpacking my trunk? I am going this moment."

And she bowed gracefully to Hugh and went into the house.

"You have planned so that we shall have but few uninterrupted hours this summer," grumbled Hugh, as they went down the river-path. "Don't walk so fast—let us be leisurely this morning."

So they loitered in the soft, bright sunshine, and watched the shadows of the floating clouds mirrored in the calm surface of the river.

"Here are roses—will you have some?" asked Hugh as they passed a great bush of wild roses in the perfection of bloom.

He cut a spray, which was a luxuriant mass of pink fragrance, carefully trimmed the thorns, and held it for a moment close to Clarice's cheek, scarcely less pink than the flowers.

"The roses suffer by contrast," he said, and with a tender little smile he placed them in her hand. "And now, tell me if your doubting mood has passed away?" he said, as they resumed their walk.

"Yes—entirely. I have perfect faith in you," she answered, turning her lovely, flushed face towards him.

"You may have," he said gently; "for I shall love you for ever and for ever——"

"That is an indefinitely long time," she returned, with a

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shy little smile. "Measure it by earthly duration—as long as the roses bloom, for instance."

"No," he said gravely; "but 'as long as the river flows.' And you?"

"Let me echo your words: 'as long as the river flows,'" she answered with tender solemnity.

Then that silence born of perfect content fell upon them, and they went on to the little cottage with again but few words; while the river whispered to the rushes and sedges at its borders that it was accepted as a type of fidelity; then all its broad, swift surface broke into a thousand ripples and sparkles, which might or might not mean that it was laughing at any confidence which might be reposed in it.

Valincott rode over oftener than ever, to idle away his mornings at "The Reeves," as the old mansion was called.

"Now that there are two attractions instead of one, one may be pardoned for coming twice as often," he would gallantly declare. And Clarice would give a pretty grateful look, while Lucie would smile softly.

"Subtly," Mrs. Reeves would say. "For that girl is nothing if not subtle!" she would declare angrily. "And totally devoid of feeling, too. She would button her gloves, organise a gunpowder plot, or assassinate a Tsar with equal calmness. Only the other day, she coolly asked me which was the richer, Dr. Darrell or Mr. Valincott!"

All this Mrs. Reeves would confide to an intimate, adding that Clarice's blindness drove her to desperation, and that so much duet-practising and boat-rowing was only a pretext for flirtation.

Dr. Darrell, however, refused to transfer his allegiance to the new-comer, or be more than barely polite to her.

"There are no friends like the old friends," he would say, when Clarice accused him of his defection. "Your cousin is very charming, but I have no time for small-talk."

And the stalwart doctor, with his fine, straightforward face and earnest grey eyes, was very tender in his manner to Clarice, as if he would shield her from impending harm.

That very morning, Lucie and Valincott were on the river. There had been a pretence of learning to row; then they had drifted into one of the secluded, rush-bordered inlets, where Lucie was idly trailing an oar in the water, and telling Hugh in a low, tremulous voice a pathetic story of the barrenness of her life in the old parsonage.

There were tears in the dark, beguiling eyes, and a sad downward droop in the corners of the lovely scarlet mouth, while the pliant, exquisite figure was inclined slightly towards him.

Hugh had been struggling for days against the spell she was weaving around him, and at that moment was struggling with his better self.

She had been looking down, but she slowly raised her eyes and looked at him through the long lashes, with a semblance of shyness which only half concealed the passion that lay behind it.

Hugh's handsome, dark face grew pale with emotion, and, when he spoke, it was with a husky voice.

"Let me make your life beautiful," he said. "There are far countries where existence passes like a dream"

"But—Clarice?" she murmured

He placed her carefully in the boat, then loosened it from its moorings.

Valincott made no answer, but took the oars from her and rowed home in silence.

There had been several dances at the neighbouring houses—dances at which Lucie had received plenty of attention and admiration; but the gaieties of the season were to culminate in a ball to which most of the residents in the vicinity were to be invited.

When Lucie made a show of protestation against the lovely dress ordered for her, Clarice would only laugh and say:

"It is so little for me to do. Then just think how fine it will be for you to be the bright particular star of the evening!"

But, the very morning of the ball, Lucie was saying to Valincott: "I am simply a fad of Clarice's. She tired of her district-visiting, wore her gaieties out, and wanted to be amused; so she sent for me. And now she has been devising a costume for me, in which I am to reflect credit on her."

They were in the dim, fragrant drawing-room, and had been singing together; but Lucie was then touching the keys lightly, and looking up into his face with her wonderful eyes.

Having made this audacious speech, she smiled in a slow sweet fashion which showed her lovely teeth, struck a few minor chords, and added: "I am nothing if not frank."

"It is refreshing!" warmly declared Valincott, with a half angry feeling towards Clarice for patronising such a glorious creature.

It was the universal verdict that Miss Reeves and her cousin were the most beautiful girls at the ball.

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"Almost in bridal white," whispered Hugh, as he whirled down the long room with Clarice in the first waltz. "Nothing could be more lovely!" he added, looking with admiration at the gown of dead-white silk, ropes of pearls, and a great cluster of creamy roses; while she looked up at him a moment with a shy, tender look in her soft hazel eyes, then blushed divinely.

However lovely Clarice was, Lucie that night was the cynosure of all eyes.

"A symphony in pale gold," declared one of the leading society men.

When the pretty speech was repeated to Mrs. Reeves, she only shrugged her shoulders, substituted "sinner" for "symphony," and whispered it to her intimate. And then, dowager-fashion, the two nodded and talked earnestly behind their fans; for, just at that moment, Lucie passed by on Valincott's arm, in her pale gold silk, just a shade darker than her hair, which had its luxuriance confined by a curiously wrought golden dagger set with yellow stones, while she wore a necklace and bracelets of the same stones, and at her corsage a bunch of pale-yellow roses with amber hearts.

"And you do not even admire her to-night?" Clarice was exclaiming reproachfully to Dr. Darrell, as the couple passed them.

"Less to-night than any time. She is Lilith—if we could find her dead lovers, there would be one of her golden hairs round their hearts."

"She has no lovers," laughed Clarice; "I doubt if she ever had one. She doesn't seem to care about them."

"No?" returned Darrell with an equivocal inflection. And again he looked down with a sad, grave air at the lovely head, with its masses of shining bronze-brown tresses.

Later in the evening Valincott and Lucie had gone out on the balcony—for "a breath of air," as Lucie said. They had turned one of its corners and were in a sheltered secluded nook.

"It is cold even here; the breeze comes this way—let me protect you!" and he placed her in front of him.

But she suddenly wheeled and stood so near to him that the roses she wore were crushed against him and filled the air with perfume; her dark eyes were glowing, and her beautiful bare arms gleamed white. She bent her head so that the fragrant golden hair just brushed his cheek and sighed softly.

"You sigh—are you unhappy?" he asked tenderly.

Then she softly raised her bewildering eyes and he saw in them what men saw in Lilith's eyes, in Circe's eyes, in Cleopatra's eyes—and drew her head to his breast, and held her close to his heart for a moment; then he released her, and they stood looking down the river, where the full moon made a long, shining pathway on the water.

"See!" said Lucie; "a golden roadway, leading where?"

"To bliss, if you will go with me. Let us row down the river," he said, in a low, constrained voice.

And she silently followed him down to the boat-house.

"In the boat-house are rugs," he said; "they will serve for protection against the dampness."

He wrapped her in one, but not before she had put both soft, white arms about his neck and clung to him, and he had covered her face with kisses.

Then, placing her carefully in the boat, he loosed it from its moorings, and, with long, steady strokes, sent the frail craft out into the narrow, glittering track of the moon.

* * * * *

An hour and a half later, Mrs. Reeves came up to Clarice with an anxious air.

"Everybody is going home," she said. "Where is Hugh? And where is Lucie? They have been gone from the ballroom a long time."

"I thought perhaps they were in the cardroom. Will you kindly speak to them, Dr. Darrell, and ask Mr. Valincott if he will please order our carriage?"

Darrell returned with a grave face.

"I cannot find him," he said. "He has not been seen for an hour or more."

"Undoubtedly Lucie has been taken suddenly ill, and he has gone home with her."

"Possibly," assented the doctor; "I will see if your carriage has gone." And he hurried away.

"It is here," he said, returning shortly after. "Shall I order it for you?"

"Yes," answered Mrs. Reeves with decision. "Come, Clarice!"

"Say something to people," implored Clarice, with a white face, when they reached the dressing-room. "Say that Lucie is ill and has gone home. I think we shall find her there, do not you?" And she looked at her aunt with pitiful intreaty.

"Oh, very likely," returned her aunt evasively.

"Permit me to accompany you," said Dr. Darrell, who stood waiting for them with his overcoat on and his hat in hand. "My man will drive over after me."

Clarice could not join in the conversation on the way home, for her heart was like a leaden weight; but she eagerly ran up the steps and touched the bell, while the doctor was handing her aunt out of the carriage.

"Miss Dayton has come home?" she questioned the sleepy maid, who replied that she had not.

"Are you sure?"

"Quite sure, Miss Reeves."

"I do not understand it." And she turned to her aunt and Dr. Darrell, with a strained, anxious look in her lovely eyes.

Mrs. Reeves did not trust herself to speak, but turned away with set teeth and firmly compressed lips, while Darrell tried to reassure her.

"They have been unavoidably detained and will undoubtedly soon be back." Then he looked at his watch. "It is after three now. They may be waiting for daylight.'

Clarice was deathly pale and her teeth were chattering as with ague-chill.

"Here, child—drink this," said her aunt, who had sent the maid for wine. Then she wrapped her in a fur-lined cloak and stood with one arm protectingly round her, while the doctor said that he would go in search of the truants.

"You must try and get some rest," was his parting injunction.

But Clarice only walked backwards and forwards from the drawing-room into the great hall, while Mrs. Reeves bemoaned the day that Lucie Dayton, with her beautiful face and false heart, entered the house.

"I never trusted her," she said. "And she has enticed Hugh to his ruin."

"Don't—don't say that; you hurt me!" exclaimed Clarice putting out her hand with a gesture of intreaty. "Do not condemn him until there is proof."

Then the day dawned, showing pallid streaks of sky between great dark rifts of clouds; and a slow, drizzling rain set in, and dripped, dripped, from the roof in mournful accompaniment to the river's sullen murmur.

Clarice still paced the floor, her face wearing the pallor of death, while great dark circles were under the beautiful eyes. The roses hung from her corsage, crushed and faded, and their petals were strewn over the carpet, and seemed to her typical of her blighted hopes.

Her aunt tried to comfort her, and her maid followed her about with an extra wrap, and urged her to take some light refreshment; while Tiny even offered his dumb sympathy, and whined dismally and got himself rolled up in the train of her dress.

There was an hour of dreadful suspense, and when at last footsteps were heard outside, Clarice hastened into the hall.

"I told you they would come soon," she said; "now we shall know all about it."

But the door opened only to admit the doctor, who came up to her with a grave face.

"You have something to tell me!" she exclaimed. "Say it quickly, and tell me all—even the worst. Anything rather than this uncertainty!"

"Some men found an empty skiff——" He paused, shocked by her ghastly face. "Can you endure the rest?" he asked gently.

Her lips were dumb, but she bowed her head and went up to him and clasped her hands round his arm, as if for support.

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"The bodies of your cousin and Mr. Valincott were washed ashore and have been carried to the boathouse. His friends have been telegraphed for," he continued, "and will be here by the next train. I await your directions regarding Miss Dayton's remains. One thing more," and Dr. Darrel bent low over the slight figure and laid his hand protectingly on the cold little fingers that were interlaced on his arm. "It is thought that, on their way down the stream, their boat was overturned by the wash of a steamer."

Clarice bowed her head on Darrell's arm in mute agony.

"Lean on me," he said tenderly. "Let me comfort and protect you, as if I were your father or brother."

Mrs. Reeves came close to the doctor's side and said, in a low voice: "As for this matter upon which you wish Clarice's decision, I will take it in my own hands. Now, will you help me to get this poor child to her room, and leave a prescription for her?"

To Clarice, whose life hung in the balance for weeks, the tragedy became like the memory of a terrible dream. Her illness spared her a keen realisation of the facts; she did not see Lucie's brokenhearted father, or hear Hugh's mother deplore his inconstancy.

But she did realise more and more, as time passed, the unfaithfulness of her lover, and the treachery of her friend, and it required all the strength of a resolute will to prevent her sweet nature from turning to a bitter misanthropic one. She clung to Mrs. Reeves, who, with all her grimness, had a warm motherly heart, and confided in Dr. Darrell.

After a time—a long time, in fact, the doctor ventured to plead his cause.

"No," answered Clarice, "I have no heart to give. And then, would you have me be unfaithful, too? I promised Hugh, that, as long as the river flowed, I would love him."

The doctor said no more, and time passed—on wings, to most people; but to Clarice so slowly. For Darrell's visits were less frequent, and she missed them more than she cared to own; then rumour connected his name with that of a fair young widow, and, when he did come, she met him with restraint and a wholly changed manner.

"I do not see," he said to Mrs. Reeves, "why my little friend has so changed towards me."

"Do you not?" she returned, with a shrewd little smile.

It was drawing near Christmastide and the month had been the coldest December known for many years.

Clarice stood, late one afternoon, looking out at the snow-crowned hills and dreary, dismal landscape; at the bare brown branches of the trees outlined against the cold grey of the winter sky; at the leafless shrubs and utter absence of life; and she felt that the scene repeated itself in her heart—so barren and desolate, its summer hopes all fled.

The revivifying finger of Spring might touch Nature and give it sunny skies and green fields and leaves and flowers, but what could bring back her lost joys? And now the faint new hope that had begun to awaken in her heart was dead, too!

She sighed deeply and came back to the fire with a shudder.

Then she crouched over the fire dejectedly, and sat lost in reverie until a voice at her very side caused her to start.

"Building air-castles in the coals?"

"Oh, is it you, doctor?" And she sprang to her feet.

Then she shyly glanced at him, standing there so stalwart and erect,

"Will you come to the window with me? I have something to show you," he said. "Do you see the river?"

"Yes; it is frozen over. Is not that uncommon?"

"Has it no significance to you? To me it is a symbol that I may hope; for, as it no longer runs visibly on its swift course, are not you absolved from that old promise? Will not you come to me?" he said.

She stood irresolute a moment; she had felt herself so bereft, so forsaken, so buffeted by the waves of sorrow, that she could not seem at once to grasp the idea that she might sail her storm-tossed boat into the safe harbour. Then, with a shy smile and downcast eyes, she faltered: "I cannot help coming—because—I love you," and laid her head on his breast and began her life anew.

Albert Price.

In accordance with my promise made last week, I now propose to give you some information regarding the paper which comes out next Tuesday under the title of SMITH'S WEEKLY.

In the first place, you will find in it the two features which have made SHORT STORIES so popular in the past—viz.: "IN CONFIDENCE" and "YOUR EDITOR CHATS." A portion of the paper will also be retained for the publication of short stories of a similar nature to those which you have enjoyed in this paper. Beyond this the paper will be built up on quite new and, I venture to think, popular lines. It will contain a complete novelette of some ten or twelve thousand words in length. These novelettes will be written each week by popular authors, and I have decided to include it in the new paper in deference to the continually expressed wishes of the readers of SHORT STORIES.

At least a dozen capital articles will be found in the paper, each one of interest, and written by an expert writer. A new feature will be introduced under the title of "QUIET THOUGHTS FOR SUNDAY," and will contain the brightest bits from the brightest of the Sunday journals.

Besides this, there will be a big competition in which £500 and a huge number of beautiful silver brooches are offered in prizes to readers.

Finally, we come to the serial story written by Arthur Applin, the famous author of so many great serials, entitled: "THE CLATTER OF THE CLOGS." This serial will deal with life in a factory town, and is full of human interest.

Altogether, you will find in SMITH'S WEEKLY all you found in SHORT STORIES, with the addition of an enormous amount of general reading matter thrown in free of cost.

Remember that when you go to purchase next week's number of this paper you must not ask for SHORT STORIES, but for SMITH'S WEEKLY.

YOUR EDITOR.

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Telling of the Mistake that Hilda Latimer Made.

Hilda Latimer stood before the glass in her pretty dressing-room and surveyed herself complacently. Then she put on her hat, secured it dexterously by means of two pearl-headed hat-pins, and called her maid.

"If anyone asks for me," she said, "I have gone into the village."

"Yes, miss."

Hilda hesitated.

"If Mr. Stanhope should ask," she added, and paused again.

The maid waited. Hilda tapped her dainty little foot upon the soft carpet in impatience at her own indecision.

"You may tell him the same," she said at last.

"Yes, miss."

Hilda went out of the house into the glorious beauty of a summer's afternoon. But she did not turn her steps in the direction of the village.

She had never intended doing so, but she went along the broad gravel paths of the beautiful park until she entered the wood that fringed the lake.

There was a little rustic seat near by, and upon this she seated herself with a sigh of relief. She wanted to be alone, and her recent little deception had been practised with a view to achieving this end.

She was a lovely girl—not more than two-and-twenty—with large, lustrous eyes and a wealth of rich, brown hair that shaded as sweet a face as one need wish to look upon. Her figure was tall and slender, and she moved with a grace that was pleasing to see.

She was just the sweet, womanly woman Nature designed her, and in only two things did she differ very materially from the normal girl of her age.

She was a little—just a little—over-inclined to wilfulness, and she was—or she thought she was—ambitious.

The first of these characteristics was perhaps due in part to the way in which, from her very infancy, she had been spoilt. The second was attributable to no particular cause, and being a woman, was therefore of paramount importance.

She had inspired the belief that she was the possessor of considerable literary ability, and was determined to show the world that her conviction on this head was not without foundation. She began by writing short stories, which she submitted to various magazines, with the result that two had already appeared in the glory of print to gladden the heart and budding ambitions of this charming young authoress.

There is always a rift in the lute, and hers lay in the fact that the journals containing her stories were but fifth-rate publications.

But then she was only a comparative beginner. She was not at all disheartened by her frequent failures. She had a high opinion of her dormant abilities, which, she said, merely wanted developing, and this kept her up when others would have despaired.

But she found the work a little harassing. It prevented her from enjoying herself in the way she had been accustomed to do. There was no earthly need for these self-imposed tasks. She was rich, very beautiful, and the constant centre of genuine admiration. Most girls would have been satisfied with Hilda's lot, but she had other and more important considerations to claim her attention. And now—within the past few days—a new and wonderful idea had come to her that made her tingle with growing excitement.

She would write a novel!

"Let me see," she said, as she sat in solitary state, "there must be a man in it—and a girl. They must love each other, of course, but somehow I must work in a lot of obstacles—a misunderstanding or a quarrel or something of that sort—to keep them apart. And then, in the last chapter, I shall have to clear it all up and marry them off. Yes, that will do splendidly! Oh, how glad I am I've really got genius for this sort of thing!"

She paused and looked doubtfully at the lake. She had a vague feeling that the plot she had contrived had been adopted before. It didn't sound very original. But perhaps she could work in a few side issues which would take off the lack of novelty in the main plot.

Her pretty brows contracted as she compelled herself to think. She was right in the middle of it when she heard a step behind her and a voice said:

"Good afternoon, Miss Latimer. I heard you had gone to the village, so I came down to the lake."

Hilda came out of her meditations and looked sharply at the new comer. She didn't quite know what he meant. It almost sounded as if he had guessed from the outset that she had *not* gone to the village, and the funny little smile that played about his mouth gave weight to the suspicion.

"I changed my mind," she said coolly. "A lady is allowed to do that, you know."

Edgar Stanhope made her no reply, but, seating himself on the rustic bench beside her, gazed thoughtfully out over the lake. He was a tall, handsome man of about thirty, with close-cropped, auburn hair and dark, flashing eyes. The face was genial and the expression that now distinguished it would have been eminently attractive to any but an irritated authoress whose flow of literary inspiration had been rudely interrupted. So she too looked straight before her over the broad lake and beat a little impatient tattoo on the ground with her feet.

But it was obviously impossible to prolong this sort of thing, so Edgar Stanhope had resource to commonplaces.

"What a splendid day this is!" he said. "It makes one glad only to be alive."

"It's too warm for my liking," responded Hilda.

Edgar Stanhope glanced round at his companion. There was an amused twinkle in his eye as he regarded her steadily.

"I trust my presence is not annoying you, Miss Latimer," he said.

Hilda raised her pretty eyebrows in affected amazement.

"Not in the least," she said freezingly.

Edgar laughed. Try as he might to restrain it, the laugh would come.

"I'm awfully sorry," he said apologetically, "but I really couldn't help it. I'm afraid I disturbed you in some way by my unseasonable arrival. Perhaps you were occupied with some plan for a future story—perhaps even a novel—and I have unwittingly interrupted it."

He levelled the shaft at a venture and stopped to watch its effect. He knew quite well that she had not desired his company and he wanted badly to discover the reason. He knew, too, of her little weakness, and his hint concerning a "future story" had sprung from this knowledge. But the mention of a novel struck the girl as remarkable, since she had told no one of her intention.

"What makes you think," she said slowly, "that I—that I'm going to write a—a novel?"

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Edgar Stanhope observed the partial admission and made the most of his stray shot.

"That's telling," he said. "Say I guessed it."

Hilda regarded him critically. She liked this tall, strong, handsome young man—liked him a great deal better than she did anyone else. If it had not been for her art—well, she wasn't going to think about *that*. He was a nice man—a very nice man—and she, Hilda Latimer, liked him very much. But that was all—absolutely and positively all. He grew conscious of her scrutiny, and turned his eyes to meet hers.

But she was too quick for him, and he found her calmly studying the lake again.

"I wonder," he said after a brief pause, "if I could be of any service to you in the building up of this—er—projected novel."

For a moment Hilda's eyes kindled, but she gave him a swift glance to see if he were in earnest or merely teasing her. The glance, however, somewhat reassured her.

"I don't know," she said, still a little loftily. "You've had no experience, you know."

Edgar sighed regretfully and looked helplessly down at the toes of his boots. The assumption of humility was not ill advised, for it effectually concealed the tell-tale twinkle in his eyes.

"I know," he said sorrowfully. "But—but I could learn, couldn't I?"

Hilda considered.

"I don't know," she replied, with the authority of genius. "It isn't all acquired, Mr. Stanhope. It's a gift."

"Well," persisted her companion, "who knows but what I, too, possess the same gift."

Hilda pondered thoughtfully for a moment, and then said:

"Well, it isn't impossible. Let's talk about it. If you'll listen, I'll tell you what is in my mind."

Edgar did as he was desired, and listened patiently to her already explained plot for a new and wonderful novel. The corners of his mouth twitched once or twice as she ticked off the items about "the man," and "the girl," and "the obstacles," and "the happy ending," but she was too absorbed in her subject to notice it. When she had finished there was a long pause, after which she asked him:

"Well, Mr. Stanhope, how does the plot strike you?"

Edgar fidgeted uneasily on the seat.

"I don't know," he said, thoughtfully stroking his chin. "I'm no authority, you know, Miss Latimer. But it'll have at least one merit."

Hilda looked up interestedly.

"What's that?" she asked eagerly.

"It very often happens in real life," replied Edgar with a funny little screw to his countenance. "So I suppose one might call it 'true to life,' you know."

Hilda flashed him a look of gratitude and appreciation, and the two lapsed into silence. Presently, however, Edgar Stanhope cast a furtive glance at his companion's face, and, seeing there no further trace of her former resentment at his presence, turned to her abruptly and said:

"Miss Latimer, I came here this afternoon to ask you a question which concerns my whole future life."

Hilda started, flushed, and made as though to check him. But he went on, heedless of the gesture, in a voice that told all too plainly of the emotion within.

"I love you, Hilda, with all my heart and soul, and my dearest wish is to make you my wife. I am not a poor man, dear, and I think—or, at least, I will try to make you happy. Will you have me, Hilda?"

A whirl of emotions crowded in the girl's mind.

Two things stood out pre-eminently among the rest—first the thought of her work, her art, her novel—and second the realisation that she liked—only liked—she would own no more than that—she liked this Edgar Stanhope very much indeed.

"Oh, I am so sorry," she said, while little pink blushes chased one another across her cheeks. "But it can't be—oh, it can't be! I must think of my work, Mr. Stanhope. If I mar—I mean, if I were so silly as to let such things enter my life, I should never be able to devote all my energies to art and the gifts I unquestionably possess. I must do like the man in the parable, you know, and render up a worthy account of my talents."

Edgar Stanhope seated himself on the rustic bench beside Hilda.

There was silence for a minute or two, and then Edgar said:

"Nature has endowed you, as she has endowed all true women, with an inexhaustible capability for loving. Is this talent to be neglected because of your conscientious realisation of the responsibilities of others?"

Hilda was becoming a little impatient.

"Oh, why didn't you choose Maud or Evelyn?" she said impetuously. "I believe either of them would have accepted you. *They* haven't any higher responsibilities. Why didn't you ask them?"

"Because," replied Edgar simply, "I didn't happen to fall in love with either of your sisters."

Hilda sighed.

"It's very worrying," she said with emphasis. "I'm sure Evelyn would have made you a splendid wife."

Again there was a short silence, at the end of which Edgar asked:

"Don't you love me a little, Hilda, ever so little?"

Hilda shook her head.

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"I like you awfully," she said. "But—but I don't love anybody."

Edgar Stanhope looked searchingly into her face. Her eyes met his, and a deep blush swept over her cheek. In an instant she had averted her eyes, and Edgar Stanhope turned away his head. He sighed, but there was a light in his face that certainly did not look like failure or hopelessness.

"Well," he said at last, and he spoke the words slowly, "I think I'll take your advice, Miss Stanhope. I'll make myself agreeable to Evelyn, and, at the end of a month, if I feel justified in doing so, I will propose to her. Allow me to wish you a very good afternoon."

He rose as he finished speaking, and, with a low bow, left her alone on the rustic seat by the park lake.

It seemed so strange when he was gone. There was a sense of loneliness in the air.

Hilda Latimer tried to shake off the feeling, and once more returned to her meditations concerning the forthcoming novel. But somehow the current of her thoughts had been interrupted, and, try as she might, they would not resume their former course. With an exclamation of impatience she got up and returned to the house. And all the way she was thinking of her sister Evelyn.

"She'll be very happy," she said, and then added: "I'm glad my work demands all my attention. It's ever so much better than this everlasting love-making and marrying, and all the rest of it."

But the thought didn't appear to afford her much real consolation after all.

The next day Hilda Latimer sat down before a little table in the seclusion of her own private sitting-room and wrote the title-sheet for her forthcoming novel.

Before beginning, she chanced to glance out to the park beyond, and had caught a distant glimpse of Edgar Stanhope and her sister Evelyn.

The sight seemed to disturb her. It was very absurd, particularly as she herself had recommended it. She wrote half a chapter, and then, her disgust deepening, she tore the whole to ribbons.

A solitary walk through the woods brought her no relief, and she sat down to dinner in a state of inward perturbation. Outwardly, however, she was frigidly self-possessed.

Edgar Stanhope, who was her guest, devoted himself with marked attention to the fair Evelyn, who smiled upon him graciously. Already it seemed as if some definite, though as yet unspoken, understanding existed between them, and Hilda frowned as she watched him wait upon her, anticipating her wishes even before they could be uttered. It was clear Edgar Stanhope had taken her suggestion seriously, and, as she herself had predicted, her sister Evelyn was in no way averse to the attentions of their handsome guest.

It was all just as Hilda had proposed it, and yet she was growing unaccountably miserable at the sight. He didn't even look at her.

And so the days went by, till at the end of a month Hilda had discovered the root of the whole matter and asked no further questions of herself.

A month! He had said he would devote himself to Evelyn for a month, and then, if he felt justified in doing so, ask her to be his wife.

She counted the days and the weeks since that meeting by the park lake. It was just a month ago this very day, and her heart almost stood still as she remembered it. What would he do? Ah, she knew that well enough! She had surprised them more than once, and, though their attitude had scarcely been that of recognised lovers, it had been enough to show Hilda what must be the inevitable issue of their obvious attraction to each other.

He was going away to-morrow—going back to London and his chambers in the Temple, and she knew he would put his question before he went. She stood looking out of the window, a drawn, sad little look on her lovely face, and caught a glimpse of him as he entered the house from a stroll in the park.

There was a look on his face that sent a quick pang to her heart

Evelyn was in the drawing-room, sitting there alone, and she heard him go in that direction. With a little gasp that was curiously like a sob, she put on her things as she had done a month ago and wandered down to the park lake. It was the same scene, the same rustic seat, and yet how different everything seemed.

Art? It had turned to ashes at her touch! Her great novel? She had burnt even the title-page!

What was the matter with her? Alas, she knew now, and the knowledge had come too late! Two big tears trembled on her long, dark lashes, but she brushed them away with an angry gesture. Evelyn was happy—that ought to afford her some consolation. Yet it didn't do even that. She was very miserable, and her heart ached and yearned for what it could not have.

"Good afternoon, Miss Latimer.'

Hilda gave a little start, and looked round in undisguised astonishment.

"Oh," she said, a faint tinge coming into her cheek, "I thought you were indoors, Mr. Stanhope."

"I don't know if you remember," he said slowly, "but it's just a month to-day since we sat on this seat together and you counselled me to think of your sister Evelyn in the light of my—my future wife."

He paused, and looked swiftly at his companion. But she never spoke, and he continued:

"I have spent the month, Miss Latimer, in acquainting myself with the disposition and qualities of your fair sister, and the task has afforded me more pleasure than I can ever express."

Again he paused, and glanced quickly at the girl at his side. Her face was very white, and there was a suspicious tremour of the lips.

"I'm so glad," she said, in a low, strained voice. "Evelyn is a splendid girl, and—and I hope you will be happy, Mr. Stanhope."

Edgar smiled and looked away. When at last his eyes returned to the white face at his side a great, happy light blazed up in them, and he put out one hand towards her. She flushed painfully as she saw the action, but did not move.

"Hilda," he said gently, "have you found out yet that there is more in love than in art?"

"What—what do you mean?" she gasped.

"What I have always meant," Edgar said earnestly. "I have always loved you—and only you. Won't you have me—now?"

Hilda looked up in helpless bewilderment.

"But—but Evelyn?" she said protestingly. "You—you love her—now!" The words seemed to choke her, but she must voice them.

"Evelyn is a dear, good girl," Edgar replied, with a smile. "She knew I loved you, and, like me, she thought you might grow to—to care for me. So we put our heads together and evolved a plan which would stimulate your love, if any existed at all, by means of your jealousy. And she has sent me to you now, dear, to ask you once more to be my true little wife. You don't love me now, don't you, darling?"

She nodded her head, for her lips were trembling too much to speak the word he wanted. But he stopped their trembling by touching them with his own and kissing them passionately.

"What about the novel?" he asked banteringly.

"Oh, bother the novel!" she pouted.

"Let's see," he said teasingly. "There was a man—and a girl—and an obstacle—and, in the end, complete understanding and—and happiness. Wasn't that it?"

Hilda nodded.

"Well," he said, "if we aren't novelists, we're dramatists, for though we have not written the story, we've acted it to perfection."

And then they went back to Evelyn, who met them with a laughing, mischievous face, and then ran away again before Hilda had time to scold her for her innocent little part in the deception which had been practised upon her.

So Art was routed by Love, and when Edgar Stanhope returned to town the following day, he left behind him the happiest girl in all England. **W. J. Mowbray.**

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A SUCCESSFUL EXPERIMENT.

Telling How a Tyrant was Out-Tyrannised.

"I COULD get along with him, I'm quite sure," cried Minnie Roberts.

"Nobody could get along with him!" chorussed the three other Misses Roberts in unison.

Uncle Henry was the personage of whom they spoke—a crabbed, ill-tempered, little old man—who lived in a superb old country seat in Suffolk.

He had money to leave, but his nieces and nephews secretly believed that it would be a deal easier to go to Klondyke and dig fortunes out, nugget by nugget, than to stay at home and earn them by making themselves acceptable to the old gentleman.

Emma Roberts had tried it first.

"No one can help loving Emma," said Mrs. Roberts, as she kissed her daughter good-bye.

But in three weeks Emma came back, half-frightened out of her wits.

Madge Roberts went next, but Madge, although a fine girl, with a spirit of her own, was cowed by Uncle Henry's savage eyes in less than a week.

"I'd sooner sweep crossings for a living," said she, "than be his heiress."

Rhoda Roberts, in no wise abashed by the successive failure of her sisters, was the third one to try Black Grange and its possibilities. But she also succumbed before the terrible scourge of her uncle's savage tongue.

"It's scold, snarl, snarl, scold, from morning till night!" said Rhoda, as in three days' time she tearfully related her experience to her parents.

But here Minnie, the youngest, tallest, and prettiest of the four girls, spoke up:

"I could get along with him, I'm quite sure," she said.

It was sunset—a red, flaming sunset—when she came up the terraced flight of steps that led to the house. Uncle Henry stood on the steps.

"So you are Minnie?" said he, surveying her with little twinkling eyes, like glass beads.

"Yes, I am Minnie," said the bright-cheeked girl, giving him a kiss.

"You're late," said Uncle Henry.

"I am late," said Minnie. "I thought the old carriage never would get here. The horses fairly crept and the roads were horrid."

"It's a dreadfully warm day," growled Uncle Henry

"I'm almost baked," sighed Minnie.

"The whole summer has been rather warm," said the old gentleman.

"We might as well be in the tropics and be done with it," retorted Minnie, flinging off her jacket and fanning herself vehemently.

Uncle Henry gave her the keys that night, just as he had three times before given them to her three sisters.

"I shall expect you to take charge of the whole establishment," said he. "The servants are miserable——"

"No more than one might expect," interrupted Minnie, with a deprecatory motion of her hand. "Servants are mere frauds nowadays!"

"And nothing goes right about the place."

"Nothing ever does," said Minnie.

At breakfast next morning Uncle Henry began to scold as usual.

"Fish again!" said he. "This makes four mornings this week we've had fish."

"I detest fish!" said Minnie, pushing away her plate.

"And the bread stale again!" growled Uncle Henry, breaking one open.

"Please give me the plate, Uncle Henry," said Minnie, and she rang the table bell sharply.

Betty, the cook, a stout, good-humoured woman, made her appearance.

"Betty," said Miss Roberts, "be so good as to throw this bread out of the window."

"But what am I to eat for breakfast?" bewailed Uncle Henry.

"Biscuits, of course," said Minnie. "Anything is better than imperilling one's digestion with such stuff as this! And, Betty, if you send up any more fish in a month you may consider yourself discharged—do you hear?"

"But, my dear, I am rather fond of fish," put in the old gentleman.

"One can't eat fish the whole time," said Minnie imperiously. "Here, Betty—this coffee isn't fit to drink, and the toast is burnt, and you must have put the cooking butter on the table by mistake! Let these errors be rectified at once."

"My dear," said Uncle Henry, "Betty is a very old servant, and——"

"I don't care if she is the age of Methuselah," said Minnie; "nobody can be expected to put up with such wretched cooking as this!"

"I really think she is not so bad, if——"

"Oh, pray don't apologise for her, Uncle Henry," said Minnie. "They are all lazy creatures, who must be discharged promptly if they don't do their duties."

Uncle Henry began to look frightened. He had kept Betty, Jane, and old John for ten years. Was it possible that he had scolded at them for ten years, only to have Minnie Roberts outscold him now?

"My dear," said Uncle Henry, "Betty is generally very excellent, if——"

"Dear uncle," interrupted Minnie, "pray permit me to be the judge of these matters."

Old John, the gardener, was not exempt from his share of the general turmoil. Miss Roberts chanced to hear her uncle reproaching the old man for some fancied neglect in the flower-beds, the pride of his horticultural heart, and she promptly came to his aid.

"Gardening, indeed! Do you call this gardening?" she said. "Uncle Henry, I'm astonished that you keep such a man as that about the place!"

And the torrent of taunts and reproaches which she showered upon the luckless head of poor old John was enough, as that individual observed, "to make one's flesh creep."

"My niece is a young lady of spirit and energy," apologised the old gentleman, when Minnie had gone back to the house.

"Verra like you, sir, verra like you!" said old John.

"Like me!" said Uncle Henry slowly.

And he stood full five minutes, quite speechless and motionless. And at the end of five minutes he spoke two other words, and only two:

"Like—me!"

"There's no knowin' the master, he's that changed," said Betty in the kitchen a week or two later. "He's as mild as a lamb and as peaceable as a kitten."

"Well, isn't that what the young lady told us," said Jane, "when she came down into the kitchen, the first morning after the fire was lighted, and told us she was goin' to try an experiment? We wasn't to mind a word she said, 'cause it was all by contraries. 'He don't know what his temper has got to be,' said she, 'and I'm going to show him.' And, bless her sweet heart, her plan has worked like a charm."

But Uncle Henry took all the credit to himself. He never knew that Minnie had taught him a lesson. And Minnie was his heiress and darling after all—for he will always believe that it was he "who formed her character."

T. B. Handell.

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WON BY MISTAKE.

Telling of the Curious Dilemma in which Dick Hervey Found Himself.

"THIS is getting on my nerves!" muttered Dick Hervey, pacing up and down the little room which was an offshoot, so to speak, of the private office of Mr. Roger Markham, the head of the firm of Markham and Company, wholesale commission agents. "There's no doubt that the chief is very fond and very proud of his two daughters, but it's a bit hard on a fellow to—to have to put up with as much of it as I do!"

Dick Hervey was his employer's confidential assistant, and as such was intrusted with a good deal of private work as well as office work. He was a go-ahead young fellow, and had risen by sheer ability from the post of errand boy to his present position. He had brains enough to acquire the kind of knowledge which would be useful in that line of business, and in that office in particular, and he was reaping the reward of intelligent and faithful service.

"He would be jolly wild, I expect, if he had any idea of—of——" There Dick stopped and reflected. "I don't see why I shouldn't risk it!" he mused, half audibly. "I believe she rather likes me, you know, and she's just the kind of girl who would make a fellow so happy that he didn't know where he was! 'Faint heart never won fair lady,' so they say, and a girl likes to think that a fellow has done something bold in order to get her!"

He allowed his thoughts to wander again for a few seconds.

"If the chief hadn't had those photos stuck up there I might have got over it, although I was a bit smitten when I saw her and her sister; but when you are brought face to face with a girl's photo every day, and you are half in love with her into the bargain, and you have to mix up with the private business and learn what they are doing this day and that day and hear their praises sung constantly, why it adds fuel to the flame! I am always hearing about them, and they are always hearing about me, because they continually ask the chief to get me to do this and that for them. In fact, we are almost friends without knowing it! Dash it! I'll risk it!"

This resolve taken, Dick's face assumed a determined expression, and he stole in the empty room of his chief and gazed at the two photos. The girls were just budding into womanhood; one was decidedly pretty, the other was plain. There was a charm about both, but the appearance of the pretty one was far more calculated to attract than that of her sister.

"That's my choice!" muttered Dick Hervey, gazing fixedly at the photo of the more attractive girl. "That's Lizzie; I suppose it's really Elizabeth. I'll begin to-day! The chief himself has opened the way by leaving me to send this packet home for him as he is going to stay in town to-night to attend a dinner. 'Address this to my daughter Lizzie,' he said, just as if I knew whether she had been christened Lizzie or Elizabeth. I will add something to the parcel, and that will set the ball rolling."

He had to write a note with the parcel, at the request of his employer, explaining why the parcel was sent instead of being taken home by the proud father, and Dick had the temerity to add a postscript, begging the girl's acceptance of a curiosity which he had "come across" in the city. This was a small book, sold for sixpence, a miniature edition of Handel's "Messiah," with music and words. Lizzie Markham was fond of music, he knew, and the book would arouse her interest.

"I shouldn't be surprised if the chief thought I was trying to woo his daughter in order to get a lift in life; but I don't think that Lizzie will have the same bad opinion of me! I don't care a snap for his money; I can work, and I'll get on in life just as he has done. *I* don't care if he cuts her off with a shilling, and I fancy that she will be of the same mind. She looks as if she had some go in her!"

It must be confessed that Dick Hervey waited in some trepidation for the result of his first step; he was self-reliant, ready to stand up for himself, but he expected to receive an angry summons from Mr. Markham two mornings later. "I'll own up straight off!" he muttered to himself as he heard the chief enter his private office. "I'll tell him candidly that I am in love with her, and take my chances!"

The bell rang, and Dick entered with a pretended air of nonchalance.

"Just help me through this correspondence, Hervey," said Mr. Markham cheerfully. "Oh, here, before I forget it. Lizzie wants this book changed at the library; see to it, will you!"

He handed a parcel over the table, and Dick Hervey felt a thrill as his hands touched the paper. There seemed to be something magnetic about it; the very knot with which the string was tied suggested a lovers' knot; he longed to cut the string and open the parcel, but he had to control himself.

So far his first step had not been altogether unsuccessful, because Mr. Markham had received no complaint from his daughter—that was evident!

That correspondence seemed endless. At last it was done, and Dick retired to his own apartment. In an instant the parcel of books was opened. A cold chill had swept over him during this rapid process; suppose that Lizzie had deliberately returned the "curiosity" without a word! No! There was a note on the top of the book and it was addressed to him.

It was a pleasant, simple note with a ring of genuineness in it. Lizzie Markham thanked him prettily for the "curiosity," which had greatly interested her. She supposed that he, too, was fond of music. Would he be good enough to send the office boy to the library in order to change the book sent for another?

"Good!" Dick nearly forgot himself and began to shout. She was not only not displeased; she was quite friendly over it. If she had not been interested in him, as well as in the book, she would not have said anything more than a few words of thanks, stiff and formal, whereas she had ventured to say that she supposed he was musical! The book she

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wanted in exchange for the one returned was a book of poetry, and Dick saw another opportunity.

That evening he handed to Mr. Markham the exchange book, neatly packed in brown paper, and the unsuspecting chief took it home without the least notion that he was being made the medium of a love correspondence. Yet in that parcel was a note from Dick Hervey to Miss Lizzie Markham, in which he replied to her inquiry, spoke of the pleasure which certain poems in the new book had given him when he had read them a few days previously, and artfully started an exchange of letters that was to end in undying affection.

"I'm going on with this, and will bring it to a head as soon as I can!" was Dick's comment when, two days later, he found another note in a parcel. "I don't want Mr. Markham to think that I am doing anything underhand. Perhaps he won't be so much annoyed, because Cissie, the plain one, seems to be his favourite."

In answering the second note, Dick grew more bold, and the contents of his reply necessitated a rejoinder that settled for ever in Dick's mind the question whether or not the girl entertained for him a feeling warmer than that of mere condescending friendliness. Within another fortnight a regular correspondence was going on, and the tone of the letters was growing more and more affectionate.

"Take her, my lad," said Mr. Markham, "and make he happy."

As the correspondence ran its course, the lovers saw each other's character unfold in a manner that surprised and delighted them. Lizzie discovered that the young confidential clerk had qualities which would have been suspected by very few; it was not till one obtained an intimate knowledge of him that these qualities became visible. He was manly, affectionate to a degree, and of sterling worth in every respect. As for Dick, he had not conceived that the girl upon whom his affection had been centred would have proved so womanly, so lovable, so noble. It was a contradiction to the general belief, an exception to the rule, that those who have been gifted with a charming exterior should not be so well endowed with the inner graces.

At the end of six weeks there was no longer any question of uncertainty; both had expressed themselves in a way that left no room for doubt that they loved one another.

"I am sending you a photo of myself, dearest," wrote Dick in one letter, "and I should like one of yours."

Lizzie replied that she had not one solitary photo left, but that she would have one taken especially for him.

Having arrived at this stage in their distant courtship, it was but natural that the lovers should cast about for some means of effecting a meeting. Dick longed to take the girl in his arms and kiss the original of the photo in Mr. Markham's office, and he boldly told her so in one letter. He suggested various ways of bringing about a meeting, but all savoured of the clandestine and did not commend themselves exactly to Lizzie.

"I wish it could be arranged that papa would bring you home to dinner one evening," she wrote in the letter in which she gently rejected his schemes. "I will try to engineer it. It seems to me that you might come with him one Saturday and stay till Monday, helping him to make up arrears during Saturday afternoon and evening and then having Sunday free!"

"Splendid!" ejaculated Dick. "I wonder if it can be worked?"

If the lovers had been more cool-headed, they might have considered that this was working matters a trifle under the board, but they saw nothing against it. "We shall soon have to own up, so I want to see her and settle how and when we shall do it!" muttered Dick several times during the next few days.

He waited for some sign of Lizzie's contriving, and he had not long to wait. Mr. Markham jerked it out on the Friday morning, in his spasmodic style.

"I say, Hervey, I don't seem to get even with some of these things this week. How would it suit you to come down to Elstree with me to-morrow and stay till Monday morning? You could help me during the afternoon, you see, and then you'd find it pleasant round there on Sunday at this time of the year. What do you say? Any appointments on?"

"No, sir! That will suit me quite well!" responded Dick. He spoke deferentially, taking care not to show too much readiness.

"Then that settles it!" said Mr. Markham, looking pleased.

The head of the firm rather liked the young fellow, who did not take a yard when he was given an inch, as some up-to-date young fellows are apt to do. It did not occur to Mr. Markham that Dick might take Cupid as a companion.

Dick's heart beat high at the prospect of meeting his beloved; in fact, it did not resume its ordinary rate of motion for the rest of that week. He went about like one in a dream till the moment arrived when he was to accompany Mr. Markham to the train *en route* for Elstree, and then the nearness of his happiness had the effect of sobering him.

They were nearing Elstree when Mr. Markham introduced the subject of his daughters.

"You have seen them, haven't you? Yes, of course; they have been to the office two or three times—not lately, though. I expect you young fellows have smiled at me for having their photos in my office, but they are very dear to me. Especially—well, I ought not to make invidious distinctions, for they are both very good girls, but Lizzie takes the place of her dead mother more naturally than Cissie, somehow. Lizzie's photo is the left-hand one, you know—the one nearest the door."

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"You mean that that is the photo of Miss Cissie, as you call her, sir?" corrected Dick quietly.

"Cissie?" said Mr. Markham, looking up questioningly. "Did I say——. What did I say? I thought I said Lizzie! That's what I meant, at any rate! Her photo is nearest the door. Some people think she is decidedly plain, and I admit she has but a modicum of good looks to help her; but Lizzie is my favourite! Only you mustn't say anything of what I have said to you, young man! I fear that I have been telling tales out of school!"

Dick Hervey turned and gazed out of the window, lest Mr. Markham should see the trouble in his face. What did it mean? He was dazed, but he realised that it meant that he had made a dreadful blunder! He had mistaken the names, and had been paying court to the plain girl! He had fallen in love with one girl and had declared that love to another! The plain one! He remembered now that she was just the least bit lame; very slightly and many persons would scarcely notice it. His soul revolted at the thought that he had been binding himself to this girl in words, while in his own heart he had given himself to her sister! He dimly heard Mr. Markham saying that Cissie was away for the week-end so he would have to face Lizzie alone!

It was a terrible dilemma; he shut his teeth hard and tried to think it out. The charm which had pervaded her letters appeared to vanish. How could he take this girl to his heart when he had believed that he was winning her sister?

Could he get out of the dilemma? He thought of pretending to be ill or something, and insisting on taking the train back to town. That would not help him ultimately, he remembered. No; the only thing to be done was to meet her and decide. He could take her aside, on the Sunday, and tell her the truth, asking her to release him. Or, and this was the alternative, he could meet her and say nothing of his mistake! In the former case, Lizzie would be happy, while he—what would that be for him? He could not tell! In the latter case he would be free, and Lizzie—would break her heart!

"What shall I do?" he groaned as the train stopped at Elstree.

As his feet touched the platform, his mental vision appeared to be extended. His whole being changed. Like a flash the many sentences and sentiments of Lizzie's letters passed through his brain.

"She will make a good wife," he murmured. "I will say nothing for her sake! If any one must suffer, it must be I! So I will meet her and let her continue to believe that I have never been thinking of the other. And perhaps—who knows?—I may afterwards be glad that I am acting thus!"

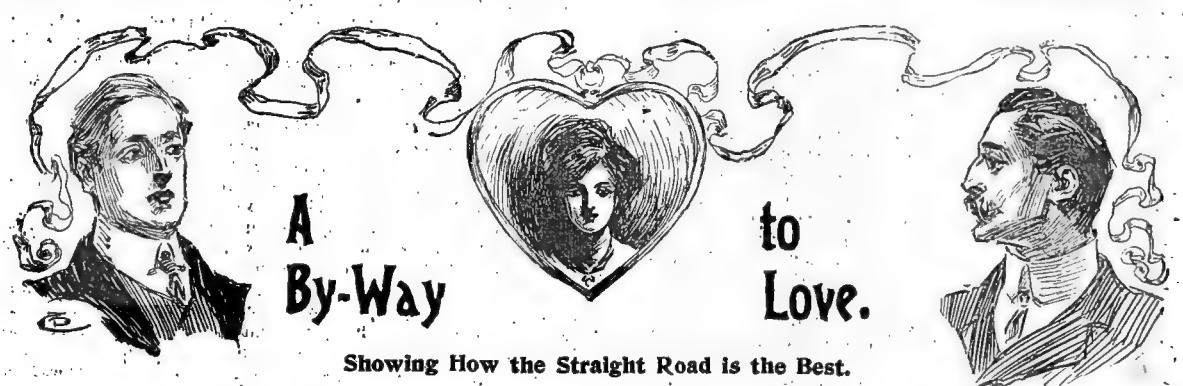
In that frame of mind he met her; and, without even asking for Lizzie's consent, he made a confession to Mr. Markham and requested the hand of that worthy gentleman's daughter in marriage. Mr. Markham was taken completely by surprise, but he promised to think it over.

It was on Sunday morning that Mr. Markham came up to Dick, leading Lizzie by the hand. The girl was blushing and her eyes were downcast.

"Take her, my lad!" said Mr. Markham with a tremulous voice. "And make her happy!"

"I will!" replied Dick Hervey fervently, as he kissed the girl he had wooed and won by mistake.

Lester Muscott.



A By-Way to Love.

Showing How the Straight Road is the Best.

"I CAN'T get the girl's face out of my mind since I saw her a fortnight ago!" murmured Ralph Sothcott. He dropped his pen on the large blotting pad and leant back in his chair. "The fact is, I now discover that I have actually portrayed her—in physical appearance at least—as the heroine of my last short story. Phew!" He grew warm as he thought of the possibility. "I hope she won't read it and recognise herself!"

Ralph Sothcott was a rising young author; he was not conceited, rather the reverse, but it was not extraordinary that he should imagine that most people round about him should read his productions. This girl, whose name he did not even know, was a neighbour, although she apparently resided at one end of the long street and he lived at the other; it was highly probable that she would know about his writing and look out for his stories, and then——!

"I hope to goodness she won't!" he breathed fervently. "If I hadn't sent that manuscript in, I would re-write the story and cut her out! Yet I'm positive that I couldn't find a better character to substitute!"

Ralph Sothcott was conscious that he had spent a good deal of his time since that morning in watching for that girl to pass his window; he had been rewarded several times, and each time he liked the girl's appearance more, so that he had ended by discovering that he had fallen in love with her. He felt that he had committed an absurdity, but he could not help it. He had scrutinised her figure, her bearing, her features, and he had been satisfied with them and had deduced therefrom that her disposition was a loving and a lovable one. If it were not, he argued, her demeanour, the expression on her face, would all have been different from what they were. Yet, after all, it was mainly conjecture on his part!

"I don't care!" cried Ralph, rising and pacing the room restlessly. "I'm in love with her, and I cannot rest till I know more about her, till I come in contact with her. How can I manage it?"

That was a puzzle. Most other young men would have found little difficulty in carrying out some scheme whereby to effect a speaking acquaintance with this young lady, but Ralph was different. He could write love passages, he could evolve schemes and carry them out in fiction, but when it came to practice he was at a loss. He was too bashful to attempt any bold plan, such as some of his own masterful heroes had done.

"I believe that a girl likes a masterful man," he mused sorrowfully, "but I can't carry out anything so bold. I can think of any number of plans, but I couldn't carry them out to save my life!" And just then a horrible thought

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flashed across his mind and he felt an icy chill go slowly down his back. "Perhaps she is already engaged!"

Ralph Sothcott's feelings at that moment were not to be envied. He felt cold in the spine, but very warm in the head, while in the region of the heart there was such a strange sensation that even he, with his experience of describing the sensations of lovers, could not define. It was as if someone were clutching at that organ, preventing it from doing its work properly.

"Suppose she is engaged? I shall never know another happy minute!" he groaned, repeating the very last sentence he had set down on paper. The thought nerved him as nothing else could have done. "I must get to know her somehow, I *must!*"

Mrs. Peters, his landlady, could tell him about this dainty young lady, but he must be careful. Mrs. Peters looked after him well enough, but she was something of a dragon, and, moreover, she would not wish to lose her lodger, which would certainly happen if he married. He thought the matter over, and he went farther and farther into it till he had excogitated a plan whereby he might find out what the girl was like, if she were engaged, and, if not, whether she liked him—all without betraying himself. "It is so horrid," he told himself, "to lay your heart bare and then find that the object of your affection doesn't want it!"

Laura, his sister, had informed him on one memorable occasion that he would never marry because he was too timid to mingle with the other sex and to make love; and for the same reason, according to the same candid authority, he would never make a great name as a novelist, because a man who cannot make love will certainly not be able to write love passages and describe love scenes, as they should be written and described.

"I think I have succeeded fairly well at the writing," mused Ralph reflectively, "so I may falsify Laura's prediction in the other direction. Yet," he added suddenly, "I believe I succeeded better than ever in that last story, and—and I wrote that while I was falling in love!"

Ralph set to work immediately, and fortune favoured him.

"I have seen a young lady pass here day after day, Mrs. Peters," he mentioned innocently when she brought his tea. "Seems to me that she hasn't any work to do! I distinctly disapprove of girls idling away their young days just because they are too high and mighty to go out to work! It isn't right. It robs a girl of her independence to know that her parents will provide her with all she wants without her raising a finger to help herself!"

His tone was slightly indignant. Glancing askance at Mrs. Peters, he saw that worthy lady's face assume an expression of indignant protest.

"I'm sure you can't know what you're saying about Miss Effie Wallis, Mr. Southcoat!" she said haughtily. She found a difficulty in pronouncing his name as softly as it ought to be uttered, and she usually broadened the vowels and called him "Southcoat." "She is as nice a young lady as you'd wish to speak to—always so pleasant, so good-tempered——"

"I was sure of it!" cried Sothcott triumphantly. "I mean, I am pleased to hear it, Mrs. Peters," he corrected hastily.

Mrs. Peters looked at him with a puzzled air; she inwardly remarked that "them orthers are curious persons," and went on with her defence of Miss Effie Wallis.

"She is a right-minded girl in every way, as I happens to know, Mr. Southcoat. And the reason why she isn't doing nothing just now is as simple as can possibly be. She was in an office, doing shorthand and typewriting, and she hurt her hand. Then the manager wanted to get someone of his own into the place, so he said as he was sorry, but he couldn't wait till her hand got well, and he'd have to fill her place. And so she's been at home, but I do hear as she is looking out for a situation now, or going to."

Sothcott tried to hide his exultation by hastily taking a sip of tea, with the result that he nearly scalded his throat. Things were working in the very way he desired. The fact that Effie Wallis was a typine simplified matters considerably.

"How strange!" he remarked, as soon as he could speak. "I am even now advertising for a young lady to work here. I always have to get my copy typewritten, as most editors insist on it, and I rather fancy that I am suffering from writer's cramp; so I have decided that it will be best to employ a typino and dictate. Girls are best for such a position, and such a lady assistant will save me a lot of time, you know. Wouldn't it be curious if Miss Wallis were to answor the advertisement?"

Mrs. Peters admitted that it would, and even went so far as to say that if she knew the name of the paper in which Mr. Southcoat had advertised, she might contrive to turn Miss Wallis' attention discreetly in that direction. Either Mrs. Peters was dull, or she did not fear losing her lodger.

Sothcott had to be evasive; he had to say that as soon as the advertisement appeared for the second insertion he would let Mrs. Peters see it. And then he had to go out for a walk and take that advertisement straight to the office of a daily paper and arrange to have it appear on the following morning.

The result of that manœuvre was that Miss Effie Wallis made a personal application, which ended in mutually satisfactory terms being settled. Sothcott ordered a second-hand typewriter at once, and Miss Wallis thought that he was very easy to please—he agreed to everything so readily.

The commencement of the following week saw Miss Wallis installed in her new position; it also saw Sothcott more in love than ever and deeply embarrassed concerning his plan of work and his plan of a love campaign. How on earth was he going to dictate love passages of stories to her?

However, after the first morning they settled down fairly well. During the first day the work was prosaic, mainly consisting of collecting data for an article; the embarrassment almost vanished, and Sothcott noted with satisfaction that she wore no engagement ring!

Ralph Sothcott found that Effie Wallis was not a mere slip of a girl, but in reality a woman: she was twenty-three (he was three years older, he remembered), and she was sensible and would not laugh at this or that when he dictated it, like a giddy schoolgirl.

She took the endearing sentences in a matter-of-fact way that set him at ease; it was all business, nothing more.

It was sweet to have her near; she was so helpful that he caught himself wondering how he could have got on without her. In fact, it was so pleasant to have her with him that he postponed from day to day the further execution of his plan, lest she should leave him, as she would be bound to do if he made his love known to her and she did not return it.

Then the perversity of human nature began to manifest itself; he had hoped that she would not prove embarrassing, that she would take things in a matter-of-fact way; and now that she was doing so, he was cross. Why, if she acted so coolly, he would be quite unable to make any further headway with his scheme of love-making! It was too bad!

He flattered himself that it was rather an original idea; he intended to write a story, in which he would make use of certain remarks. Those sentences would be really intended for Miss Wallis herself; if she betrayed any emotion, he would understand that she was in love with him, and if she showed no perturbation, then he would assume that she did not care for him. In that way he would spare himself the pain of rejection, and she would not be forced to withdraw.

It was nearly a month after her first appearance when he made the venture; he could not delay any longer.

"Miss Wallis," he said, as she settled down at her table, ready for work, "I should like to give you an outline of the story I wish to commence this morning. It is rather strange, but I feel doubtful. That is rather uncommon with me, I think. I should like to know what you think of it."

"Certainly, Mr. Sothcott!" she replied with alacrity. Her face showed pleasure at this action on his part. "I don't know that I am a very competent judge, but I will do my best!"

"Oh, yes! You see, you are a woman, and you can tell me if I have judged them aright! I am afraid that my heroines are not always very human. I make the lovers talk a lot of rot to them, I fear. Do you think so?"

"They appear to like it!" answered Effie Wallis demurely.

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That was not encouraging; there was nothing in that answer to show whether Effie Wallis liked it or not. Sothcott felt awkward, but he plunged into an outline of his story, while the woman he was longing to fold in his arms sat as still and unmoved as a marble figure.

"Looks as if my case were hopeless!" thought Sothcott. "If she thought anything of me, I fail to see that she could have sat there and given no sign of having recognised that I have woven a story round two characters which are none other than she and myself! Yet she hasn't moved a muscle!"

"The idea is good enough," pronounced Effie Wallis critically, "but it seems to me that you do not work it out clearly. I think that you should make it plainer to the heroine that the hero is in love. A woman wouldn't think that she was being treated fairly, perhaps, to have it conveyed to her in such enigmatic fashion!"

"Oh, wouldn't she?" asked Sothcott apprehensively. "Then you think I had better make him convey it more plainly? All right! We can do that in the writing!"

Sothcott's heart was heavy; Effie had not blushed charmingly and given him the sign for which he was waiting. He must make some of his allusions in the story more pointed, not only for the edification of the heroine, but also for the benefit of the typine!

So he began to dictate the story. He described the feelings of the young man when he first saw the girl passing through the street, and told how he watched for her and wondered how he could get an introduction.

He grew quite eloquent on this portion of the tale; he was describing his own feelings, his own hopes and fears, and he could do it to perfection. In the depths of his own emotion, he surpassed his previous literary efforts and drew a really grand picture. He came back to himself with a start and glanced quickly at her for an indication that she had divined his secret; she looked a little warm, probably because he had been dictating at a quicker rate than usual, but otherwise she was perfectly self-possessed.

The next stage was to relate how they met, and in this particular he departed from actual fact; the hero and heroine met in a very conventional manner at a ball, and, in a quiet corner, the hero began a conversation in which he timidly tried to convey to the heroine the fact that he loved her without actually saying so outright. In the dictation of this portion, Sothcott was distinctly flat and hesitating. It was not at all on a par with the pathos of the first portion.

It was the dialogue that gave him the most trouble; he could not find the proper words, either for the hero or for himself. He wanted to tell Effie that he loved her—he desired to make her understand it, rather than tell her—and to gain a clue to her own feelings, but the flow of thought and expression would not come right.

He would first dictate something which had no actual meaning; then he would tell her to strike that out and begin again, only to dictate another sentence which appeared to have no relation to the subject. Or else he would say something which was too plain to fit in with the tenour of the story, and he would stop abruptly in the middle of it for two reasons; firstly, because it was out of keeping, and, secondly, because he was afraid that his own thoughts were showing themselves to Effie in too plain a manner.

The poor fellow was in a dilemma, and it must be conceded to him in palliation that a part of his trouble was due to a chivalrous desire to spare Effie the vexation of rejecting him if she did not love him and of leaving her present post and finding a new one. If Effie had manifested any irritation at the frequent erasures and "let us begin again on a fresh sheet of paper," it would have relieved him, but she worked on quietly and patiently, as a good typine should.

"I think I must give it up for to-day!" he cried at last. "I'm making rather a mess of it!"

"I am afraid you are!" returned Effie sympathetically, yet unequivocably. "I don't think the second part of the story is good, if I may venture to say anything."

"Certainly!" cried Ralph. "I shall be glad to hear your views; perhaps you can help me out!"

"That idea of meeting in the ball-room is so commonplace; it ought to have come about in a more original manner."

"It did, in reality!" said Ralph quickly, eager to maintain his reputation. "But go on!" he added. "I interrupted you."

"It seems to me," pursued Effie Wallis calmly, "that the hero is giving himself a lot of trouble for nothing! Why couldn't he have told her straight out that he loved her?"

Ralph's breath came hard; in his agitation he paced the room with uncertain steps. He was so full of himself that he forgot that the idea of the story was not in agreement with the fact, and consequently he uttered words which had no bearing on the fiction. He did not notice that he was betraying himself.

Effie stooped to pick up her eraser, which she had dropped while toying with it. Perhaps that was why her face was so red when Ralph glanced in her direction.

There was an awkward pause. Effie appeared to have caught some of Ralph's agitation, for she rose from her chair and stood on his side of the table, her fingers nervously playing with the eraser.

"You think we had better not go on with it?" asked Ralph sadly. He was hopelessly mixing the personal with the fictitious.

Effie did not answer for the moment, but when he glanced at her, in a quick, appealing manner, she roused herself.

"I don't think it is fair to her!" she exclaimed, her voice trembling just a little with emotion. "You are sparing yourself rather than her. I mean the hero, of course! The girl would sooner or later jump at what he meant, and she would really be refusing him! But suppose she did not intend to reject him? See what a position she is placed in! It isn't fair! Why not say it straight out and take the consequences? But in that case," she added, turning away to hide her burning cheeks, "I suppose there would be no story, because it would be the usual commonplace."

"You are right!" cried Ralph Sothcott warmly, "and I feel that I have not acted properly, under a mistaken notion. No story? Bother the story! What do I care about the story? I don't want it! It's *you* I want, Effie—there, I've said it straight out! Effie!"—he took her gently by the arm and compelled her to turn and face him, which she did with hot cheeks and a half defiant, half appealing air. "I want you, Effie; may I have you?"

Effie said afterwards, when she had smoothed her ruffled hair, that he didn't give her time to answer, but just took possession of her willy-nilly, to which Ralph retorted that he read her reply clearly enough in her lovely eyes!

"And you gave yourself such a lot of trouble to accomplish what might have been attained by going straight to the point," laughed Effie. "Oh, please don't! No, I cannot say exactly when I began to love you, Ralph, so don't bother! I shall have to reflect and trace the sentiment back to its origin! Now, are we to do any more work to-day?"

"Work?" echoed Ralph in surprise. "How can I work to-day?"

"You mustn't grow lazy!" she admonished, holding up a warning finger with mock severity. "You have assumed larger responsibilities!"

"That may be, but the story is a failure and we must tear it up!"

"Not entirely! The first part is grand, because you felt what you were writing. The second part can be torn up, and it can be written in a different strain. I think that will be quite easy with the help of recent experiences, don't you, Ralph?" she asked boldly, and with a merry light dancing in her eyes.

There was more confusion, and then Effie discovered that it was time she went home to lunch. She did not return because, as Ralph informed Mrs. Peters, it was arranged that she should remain at home till the wedding, and he would work alone. Left to himself that afternoon, he took up his pen and finished the story in a way that enhanced his reputation and made Effie supremely happy as she read it.

J. Hartley.

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PHANTOM SHADOWS.

A Story of Love and Crime.

By ARNOLD BENNETT.

TWENTY-NINTH CHAPTER.

Theodore is Called to the Rescue.

When Nella returned to the State bedroom both the doctor and the great specialist were again in attendance. The two physicians moved away from the bedside as she entered, and began to talk quietly together in the embrasure of the window.

"A curious case!" said the specialist.

"Yes. Of course, as you say, it's a neurotic temperament that's at the bottom of the trouble. When you've got that and a rigorous constitution working one against the other, the results are apt to be distinctly curious. Do you consider there is any hope, Sir Charles?"

"If I had seen him when he recovered consciousness I should have said there was hope. Frankly, when I left last night, or rather this morning, I didn't expect to see the Prince alive again—let alone conscious, and able to talk. According to all the rules of the game, he ought to get over the shock to the system with perfect ease and certainty. But I don't think he will. I don't think he wants to. And moreover, I think he is still under the influence of suicidal mania. If he had a razor he would cut his throat. You must keep his strength up. Inject, if necessary. I will come in this afternoon. I am due now at St. James's Palace." And the specialist hurried away, with an elaborate bow and a few hasty words of polite reassurances to Prince Aribert.

When he had gone Prince Aribert took the other doctor aside. "Forget everything, doctor," he said, "except that I am one man and you are another, and tell me the truth. Shall you be able to save his Highness? Tell me the truth."

"There is no truth," was the doctor's reply. "The future is not in our hands, Prince."

"But you are hopeful? Yes or no?"

The doctor looked at Prince Aribert. "No!" he said shortly. "I am not. I am never hopeful when the patient is not on my side."

"You mean——"

"I mean that his Royal Highness has no desire to live. You must have observed that."

"Only too well," said Aribert.

"And you are aware of the cause?"

Aribert nodded an affirmative.

"But cannot you remove it?"

"No," said Aribert. He felt a touch on his sleeve. It was Nella's finger. With a gesture she beckoned him towards the ante-room.

"If you choose," she said, when they were alone, "Prince Eugen can be saved. I have arranged it."

"You have arranged it?" He bent over her, almost with an air of alarm.

"Go and tell him that the million pounds which is so necessary to his happiness will be forthcoming. Tell him that it will be forthcoming to-day, if that will be any satisfaction to him."

"But what do you mean by this, Nella?"

"I mean what I say, Aribert," and she sought his hand and took it in hers. "Just what I say. If a million pounds will save Prince Eugen's life, they are at his disposal."

"But how—how have you managed it? By what miracle?"

"My father," she replied softly, "will do anything that I ask him. Do not let us waste time. Go and tell Eugen it is arranged, that all will be well. Go!"

"But we cannot accept this—this enormous, this incredible favour. It is impossible."

"Aribert," she said quickly, "remember you are not in Posen holding a Court reception. You are in England and you are talking to an American girl who has always been in the habit of having her own way."

The Prince threw up his hands and went back into the bedroom. The doctor was at a table writing out a prescription. Aribert approached the bedside, his heart beating furiously. Eugen greeted him with a faint, fatigued smile.

"Eugen," he whispered, "listen carefully to me. I have news. With the assistance of friends I have arranged to borrow that million for you. It is quite settled, and you may rely on it. But you must get better. Do you hear me?"

Eugen almost sat up in bed. "Tell me I am not delirious," he exclaimed.

"Of course you aren't," Aribert replied. "But you mustn't sit up. You must take care of yourself."

"Who will lend the money?" Eugen asked in a feeble, happy whisper.

"Never mind. You shall hear later. Devote yourself now to getting better."

The change in the patient's face was extraordinary. His mind seemed to have put on an entirely different aspect. The doctor was startled to hear him murmur a request for food. As for Aribert, he sat down, overcome by the turmoil of his own thoughts. Till that moment he felt that he had never appreciated the value and the marvellous power of mere money, of the lucre which philosophers pretend to despise and men sell their souls for. His heart almost burst in its admiration for that extraordinary Nella, who by mere personal force had raised two men out of the deepest slough of despair to the blissful heights of hope and happiness.

"These Anglo-Saxons," he said to himself, "what a race!"

By the afternoon Eugen was noticeably and distinctly better. The physicians, puzzled for the third time by the progress of the case, announced now that all danger was past. The tone of the announcement seemed to Aribert to imply that the fortunate issue was due wholly to unrivalled medical skill, but perhaps Aribert was mistaken. Anyhow, he was in a most charitable mood, and prepared to forgive anything.

"Nella," he said, a little later, when they were by themselves again in the ante-chamber, "what am I to say to you? How can I thank you? How can I thank your father?"

"You had better not thank my father," she said. "Dad will affect to regard the thing as a purely business transaction, as, of course, it is. As for me, you can—you can——"

"Well?"

"Kiss me," she said. "There! Are you sure you've formally proposed to me, *mon prince?*"

"Ah! Nell!" he exclaimed, putting his arms round her again. "Be mine! That is all I want!"

"You'll find," she said, "that you'll want dad's consent, too!"

"Will he make difficulties? He could not, Nell—not with you!"

"Better ask him," she said sweetly.

A moment later Racksole himself entered the room.

"Going on all right?" he inquired, pointing to the bedroom.

"Excellently," the lovers answered together, and they both blushed.

"Ah!" said Racksole. "Then, if that's so, and you can spare a minute, I've something to show you, Prince."

THIRTIETH CHAPTER.

Conclusion.

"I've a great deal to tell you, Prince," Racksole began, as soon as they were out of the room, "and also, as I said, something to show you. Will you come to my room? We

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will talk there first. The whole hotel is humming with excitement."

"With pleasure," said Aribert.

"Glad his Highness Prince Eugen is recovering," Racksole said, urged by considerations of politeness.

"Ah! As to that——" Aribert began.

"If you don't mind, we'll discuss that later, Prince," Racksole interrupted him.

They were in the proprietor's private room.

"I want to tell you all about last night," Racksole resumed, "about my capture of Jules, and my examination of him this morning." And he launched into a full account of the whole thing, down to the least details. "You see," he concluded, "that your suspicions as to Bosnia were tolerably correct. But as regards Bosnia, the more I think about it, the surer I feel that nothing can be done to bring their criminal politicians to justice."

"And as to Jules, what do you propose to do?"

"Come this way," said Racksole, and led Aribert to another room. A sofa in this room was covered with a linen cloth. Racksole lifted the cloth—he could never deny himself a dramatic moment—and disclosed the body of a dead man.

It was Jules, dead, but without a scratch or mark on him.

"I have sent for the police—not a street constable, but an official from Scotland Yard," said Racksole.

"How did this happen?" Aribert asked, amazed and stagtled. "I understood you to say that he was safely immured in the bedroom."

"So he was," Racksole replied. "I went up there this afternoon, chiefly to take him some food. The commissionaire was on guard at the door. He had heard no noise, nothing unusual. Yet when I entered the room Jules was gone. He had by some means or other loosened his fastenings; he had then managed to take the door off the wardrobe. He had moved the bed in front of the window, and by pushing the wardrobe door three-parts out of the window, and lodging the inside end of it under the rail at the head of the bed, he had provided himself with a sort of insecure platform outside the window. All this he did without making the least sound. He must then have got through the window, and stood on the little platform. With his fingers he would just be able to reach the outer edge of the wide cornice under the roof of the hotel. By main strength of arms he had swung himself on to this cornice, and so got on to the roof proper. He would then have the run of the whole roof. At the side of the building facing Salisbury Lane there is an iron fire-escape, which runs right down from the ridge of the roof into a little sunk yard level with the cellars. Jules must have thought that his escape was accomplished. But it unfortunately happened that one rung in the iron escape-ladder had rusted rotten through being badly painted. It gave way, and Jules, not expecting anything of the kind, fell to the ground. That was the end of all his cleverness and ingenuity."

As Racksole ceased speaking he replaced the linen cloth with a gesture from which reverence was not wholly absent.

When the grave had closed over the dark and tempestuous career of Tom Jackson, once the pride of the Grand Babylon, there was little trouble for the people whose adventures we have described. Miss Spencer, that yellow-haired, faithful slave and attendant of a brilliant scoundrel, was never heard of again. Possibly to this day she survives, a mystery to her fellow-creatures, in the pension of some cheap foreign boarding house. As for Rocco, he certainly was heard of again. Several years after the events set down, it came to the knowledge of Félix Babylon that the unrivalled Rocco had reached Buenos Ayres, and by his culinary skill was there making the fortune of a new and splendid hotel. Babylon transmitted the information to Theodore Racksole, and Racksole might, had he chosen, have put the forces of the law in motion against him. But Racksole, seeing that everything pointed to the fact that Rocco was now pursuing his vocation honestly, decided to leave him alone. The one difficulty which Racksole experienced after the demise of Jules—and it was a difficulty which he had, of course, anticipated—was connected with the police. The police, very properly, wanted to know things. They desired to be informed what Racksole had been doing in the Dimmock affair, between his first visit to Ostend and his sending for them to take chrge of Jules' dead body. And Racksole was by no means inclined to tell them everything. Beyond question he had transgressed the laws of England.

The inquest upon Jules aroused some bother; and about ninety-and-nine separate and distinct rumours. In the end however, a compromise was arrived at. Racksole's first aim was to pacify the inspector whose clue, which by-the-way was a false one, he had so curtly declined to follow up. That done, the rest needed only tact and patience. He proved to the satisfaction of the authorities that he had acted in a perfectly honest spirit.

One afternoon, a fortnight after the recovery of the Hereditary Prince of Posen, Aribert, who was still staying at the Grand Babylon, expressed a wish to hold converse with the millionaire. Prince Eugen, accompanied by Hans and some Court officials whom he had sent for, had departed with immense pomp, armed with the comfortable million, to arrange formally for his betrothal.

"I wish to tell you," said Aribert, "that it is my intention to renounce all my rights and titles as a Royal Prince of Posen, and to be known in future as Count Hartz— a rank to which I am entitled through my mother. Also that I have a private income of ten thousand pounds a year, and a chateau and a town house in Posen. I tell you this because I am here to ask the hand of your daughter in marriage. I love her, and I am vain enough to believe that she loves me. I have already asked her to be my wife, and she has consented."

"You honour us, Prince," said Racksole, with a slight smile, "and in more ways than one. May I ask your reason for renouncing your princely titles?"

"Simply because the idea of a morganatic marriage would be as repugnant to me as it would be to yourself and to Nella."

"I suppose it has occurred to you that ten thousand pounds per annum, for a man in your position, is a somewhat small income. Nella is frightfully extravagant."

"Nella must reform her ways," Aribert said.

"If she is content to do so," Racksole went on, "well and good! I consent."

"In her name and my own, I thank you," said Aribert.

"And," the millionaire continued, "so that she may not have to reform too fiercely, I shall settle on her absolutely, with reversion to your children, if you have any, a lump sum of fifty million dollars—that is to say, ten million pounds—in sound, selected railway stock. I reckon that is about half my fortune. Nella and I have always shared equally."

Aribert made no reply. The two men shook hands in silence, and then it happened that Nella entered the room.

That night, after dinner, Racksole and his friend Félix Babylon were walking together on the terrace.

"I suppose, Racksole," Félix said, "you aren't getting tired of the Grand Babylon?"

"Why do you ask?"

"Because I am getting tired of doing without it. A thousand times since I sold it to you I have wished I could undo the bargain. I can't bear idleness. Will you sell?"

"I might," said Racksole, "I might be induced to sell."

"What will you take, my friend?" asked Félix.

"What I gave," was the quick answer.

"Eh!" Félix exclaimed. "I sell you my hotel with Jules, with Rocco, with Miss Spencer. You go and lose all those three inestimable servants, and then offer me the hotel without them at the same price! It is monstrous," The little man laughed heartily at his own wit. "Nevertheless," he added, "we will not quarrel about the price. I accept your terms."

And so was brought to a close the complex chain of events which had begun when Theodore Racksole ordered a steak and a bottle of Bass at the *table d'hote* of the Grand Babylon Hotel

The End.

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THE MISSING CLUE.

Telling of an Adventure at an Old Well.

"THANK you, Miss Hensley!" There was a world of bitter reproach in Basil Cartwright's voice, and his handsome face emphasised the bitterness by the expression of deep pain that overspread it. "I love you, and I imagined that you were learning to return that affection; it did not occur to me that you were using me as a plaything, that you were amusing yourself with me in the absence of the man to whom you are secretly engaged!"

Macie Hensley started as if he had struck her; her lovely face grew as pale as death and then the colour came back to her cheeks and flooded them with crimson. Her eyes flashed, and her whole frame quivered as she straightened her tall, exquisitely-moulded figure to defend herself; but something seemed to stop the torrent of refutation which rose to her lips. For a few seconds she could not speak; when she did find her voice, the indignation had changed to something akin to an appeal.

"Why do you think so badly of me, Mr. Cartwright?" she asked with quivering lips. "I have never encouraged your attentions! I liked your society"—the crimson hue became a trifle deeper here—"but I had no idea! Yes, it is true—I am engaged! The engagement was not to be made known yet, and the revelation made to you just now through a slip of the tongue, places you in possession of information which I ask you, on your honour, to keep secret for the present! The engagement was not hidden by me to deceive you, as you have unjustly hinted!"

"Then why is it a secret?" he asked, forgetting that it was really no concern of his. "Are you not proud to let the world know that you have allied yourself to a man much older than yourself because he is rich?"

The girl shrank from him and raised her hands after the manner of one parrying a blow. That movement brought Basil Cartwright to his senses; his wounded feelings had got the better of him. In a moment the gentleman within him had triumphed.

"I beg your pardon!" he said humbly. "Whatever I feel, I have no right to upbraid you in that fashion! I will leave you now; I do not suppose that we shall meet again; I will try to keep out of your sight! I have not been drafted here long, so I can tell the head office that the place does not agree with me, and ask them to send me to a branch at the opposite end of the country."

He bowed and turned away. He stood motionless, gazing out of the window and apparently unconscious that he was standing with his back to her; he had lost himself in bitter memories. After a few moments he went slowly out of the room, talking audibly to himself, and she caught the name of John Poole, the man to whom she was engaged.

If Basil Cartwright could have seen Macie Hensley after he had left her, he would have modified his opinion concerning the real character of the engagement, and the whole course of events would have been changed. Life is full of those "Might-have-beens!"

So Basil Cartwright went on his way, uttering his thoughts half-aloud—went on his way to disaster!—and Macie wept in her trouble, knowing not of the greater trouble that was coming!

She learnt of that trouble very early on the following morning, when the news spread through the town like wildfire that John Poole had been found shot on the moor; and scarcely had she recovered from the first effects of this blow when she was told that Basil Cartwright was in custody on a charge of having shot John Poole and wounded him in a manner which was almost sure to prove fatal.

Some people said that the police had their hands full of work just then, for they were still in the midst of their task of unravelling the mystery of the many burglaries which had alarmed the surrounding gentry; or, perhaps, it would be more correct to say that they were only on the threshold of their task, for they had not made any headway. And now here was another burglary and an attempted murder on the self-same night!

Other people said that it was a good thing that the evidence in the case of attempted murder was so clear. It was true that nobody knew that John Poole had returned from his journey south, but that was not of importance, that seeing he *was* there, and badly wounded; but there was very little doubt that Basil Cartwright was the guilty party. Of course, Cartwright himself stoutly denied the charge; but his denial did not count.

The facts were simple. Poole was found lying on the moor, bleeding from a wound in the side; that was quite early in the morning. His watch and chain, his purse, with money in it, and other things (such as a gold pencil-case) were untouched; this pointed to some motive other than robbery, and revenge was the best motive to settle on. Now Basil Cartwright had been seen late at night not a long way from the moor, and he was heard to mutter the name of John Poole together with a remark that Poole had already done him one injury, and now was doing him another by taking Macie from him. The man who overheard this muttering was surprised at Cartwright's behaviour; the young man appeared to be a "bit looney-like." What had Miss Hensley to do with Poole? Poole had certainly paid her some attention, and the same remark applied to Cartwright himself; so—what? It did not take long for the inhabitants of the town to put two and two together, aided as they were by Macie's own incoherent words and her insistence on seeing the wounded, unconscious man.

Cartwright had been on the moor late at night; he admitted

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that, and it would not have been useful to deny it, for he had been seen on the edge of the moor, and near O'Grady's cottage. The curious thing was that a pearl was found near that cottage—a pearl which formed part of the property stolen by the burglars, who had entered Sir Richard Grenby's residence before midnight!

Then, Cartwright was confused when seen coming off the moor, and there was a bloodstain on his coat sleeve. He did not pretend that he had scratched his finger, or anything of that kind; he simply said that he couldn't account for it.

It did not take the inhabitants of the quiet town long to sum it all up. Macie had given the confirmation of the clue uttered by Cartwright in his muttering. Macie was secretly engaged to Poole; Cartwright also wanted her, and had been refused; in his jealous rage at this discovery, Cartwright had shot his successful rival, perhaps in a quarrel. Poole was not conscious, so he could not give any information whether there had been a quarrel or not, but as he had plainly been fired at from a point almost in front, it was quite probable that there had been some words between the two men.

The wound had been inflicted by a bullet from a revolver, but the revolver was not to be found.

After having attained her object in visiting the wounded man, who lay motionless and at death's door, Macie declared that she must visit the prisoner. Again she was so insistent that, through the influence of her uncle, her only relative, she was granted permission to visit Cartwright.

"She don't carry on much!" said one woman to another, as Macie left the house in which the wounded man lay. "Happen she don't care much for him after all. Queer affair, that engagement, eh? Wonder why she should hit on a man like Poole? She's as pretty a girl as you'd find anywhere, and it's no wonder that so many of the young fellows run after her!"

Yet the sight of the white, set face impressed them. Within that slight, girlish frame was an indomitable spirit; she was a girl who would do much.

They were granted a private interview, Macie and Cartwright, after the former had given a positive assurance that she carried no weapon or other instrument that could serve the prisoner. Macie repressed a shudder; it was not so much the question of an attempt at escape as the possibility of suicide, against which the police felt bound to take such precautions.

As Macie entered the cell, Cartwright, who had been seated with his elbows resting on his knees, and his face buried in his hands, looked up wearily. His face had grown very haggard in that short time. He stared at Macie as though he could not believe the evidence of his senses; then he sprang to his feet and faced her. Thus they stood for a full minute, gazing steadfastly at one another without speaking.

"Well," he exclaimed at length. "Why have you come here, Miss Hensley? To upbraid me for shooting your lover? Of course you believe me guilty, like all the rest?"

He spoke drearily; there was no trace of bitterness in his voice, only blank despair.

Macie's eyes had been fixed upon him with a penetrating gaze. As he finished speaking she held out her hand to him.

"No," she declared steadily. "I do not believe you guilty! I had my doubts at first, that is partly why I came here—to see if my doubts were justified. I am satisfied now that they are not!"

"Do you really mean that?" he demanded quickly, his whole demeanour changing. "Do you mean it?" he demanded again, seizing her hand with both his own, while his eyes looked searchingly into her, which withstood the scrutiny unflinchingly. "Heaven be thanked!" he added gratefully. "At least one person believes in my innocence!"

"I do!" confirmed Macie decisively. "And now, I wish to do what is possible to solve this mystery. The pistol must be found! You were on the moor somewhere about the time that the—the attempted murder took place. Did you see anyone or anything?"

"I passed two men near the edge of the moor," returned Basil, striving to collect his scattered thoughts. "One was O'Grady, I vaguely remember his voice. I had forgotten about the other man; that must have been just before I saw O'Grady. I brushed against him near that clump of bushes, you know the place better than I. You are not so new to the moor as I am. I apologised for brushing against him I recollect now, and wished him 'Good night' after the usual fashion, but he only growled."

"You brushed against him?" asked Macie eagerly. "Which side?"

"He was on my right," answered Basil, regarding her with some surprise.

"The bloodstain on your clothes—is that on the right?" was the further eager query.

"Yes!" came the swift response, as a light crept into the eyes of the accused. "Miss Hensley! Can it be——"

He was alive now; roused from the lethargy into which he had fallen, his eyes danced with intelligence.

"It means that you brushed against the murderer!" she declared positively. "It will be difficult to make the police believe that, especially if no trace can be discovered of the man, but we must try. I think I will visit the spot first, before the fact is mentioned to the police. I wonder that you did not tell them——"

"Because the events of yesterday upset me too much!" he said frankly. "I do not wish to rake up old troubles, Miss Hensley, but that is the truth. I am better now, and I can give all the known facts to the solicitor whom my friends will engage to defend me. If you can help me——"

"I must seek the key to this mystery, for Mr. Poole's sake, if for no other reason!" she replied slowly. "I will ask for another interview with you later. Perhaps not till to-morrow, though!"

They shook hands like old friends in mutual distress, and Macie left the prison. Cartwright fell back on his seat with a sigh; he was more deeply in love with Macie than ever. Miss Hensley wondered what the feeling was that disturbed her heart as she left the gloomy prison, but she refused to probe it. She was afraid, although she did not confess her fear.

"That clump of bushes," murmured Macie as she went along the town in the direction of her home in company with her uncle, a gentleman of some means, and much less ability. "The police are searching for the revolver, but they will not go so far as that clump of bushes yet. And those bushes hide a deep well, unused because the water became foul. Is it possible?"

With that extraordinary determination that comes to many of the seeming frail girls and women in times of trial—with the determination and courage that have made the name of the British women resound throughout the world in the troublesome times of war and the equally great dangers of peaceful cities—Macie went to work. She might have told the police and let them do the work, but she was possessed by an indefinable desire to do it herself, if it did not prove to be beyond her strength. That actuating desire was born of a sentiment which she recognised later.

She deemed it advisable to wait till dusk before venturing on her hazardous mission, but so soon as the daylight began to fail, she was off. Her easy-going, somewhat simple-minded uncle left her much to her own devices and she was often out at parties, so there was no difficulty. When well on her road, she began to reflect that it would have been better to have brought Jim, the odd man, or have told someone.

"No matter!" she told herself impatiently. "I have set out on the errand now, and I'll go through with it!"

It was quite dark when she came within sight of the clump of bushes; or, more correctly, it would have been within seeing distance if there had been a moon, but it was very dark. Macie knew where she was and made her way cautiously and unerringly to her destination.

"The old rope was still hanging from the stiffened windlass a few weeks ago," she muttered, "so I hope it is there still! Will it bear my weight, I wonder? If it hadn't been for the superstition of the people about here, that rope would have been appropriated before it reached its present condition, but the belief is that it is risky to have anything to do with the old

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well. It is a fact that three men lost their lives in the attempt to purify it!"

Superstition is not good in a general way, but Macie was grateful for the prevalence of that sentiment in the minds of those who lived in the neighbourhood, for it gave her the chance she desired. She penetrated the clump with unusual caution, for she fancied she might light on some other evidence in connection with the attempt on John Poole. Arrived at the well, she felt along the broken wall that surrounded the mouth and passed her hand along the windlass; the rope was still hanging!

She had dressed herself in a short, tight-fitting skirt, which she wore for gymnasium exercises and this left her tolerably free. In a moment she was seated on the crumbling wall and was pulling up the rope to ascertain if it were long enough to reach the bottom. This fact was ascertainable by examining the lower end of the rope; if it were frayed to any extent, it would suggest that it had been worn away. To her delight she found that the hook was still attached to the end, proving that it was entire.

"It remains now to prove whether it is strong enough to bear me or not!" she soliloquised. "It feels rather rotten, but it may hold. H'm! I shall have to risk it!"

It was a curious scene, this night scene in the clump of bushes! Some of the shrubs had grown to a length which made them bow over towards the well, thus forming something in the nature of a shelter.

Macie realised the risk she ran; if the rope snapped, she would fall a terrible way into the hollow that yawned below her, she would be so injured that she would lie at the bottom and drown or, if the well chanced to be dry, she would lie there huddled up till death came to release her from pain! Nevertheless, she set her lips firmly and prepared for the descent into the depths!

She had allowed the lower end of the rope to fall down the shaft; there was nothing more to unwind from the windlass; so she gripped the decaying line and gently swung herself off the wall that protected the mouth of the well.

It was a queer sensation, that of finding herself dangling between sky and earth, so to speak, but she resolutely banished all uncanny thoughts from her mind and went down, hand under hand, and feet twined loosely round the rope for support. When about half-way down, her heart gave a great bound; her hands had passed over a weak spot in the rope, where the strands were half worn through, and she realised that as she went lower and consequently increased the weight on this weak point, it might break!

At length, however, her feet touched something liquid and cold, and she knew that she had reached the water. Was it deep? Was there any ledge on which she could rest? At the same time she became conscious of an odour that might well prove stifling before she could accomplished her task.

"I must lose no time!" she cried, half aloud. "I must search quickly for the missing revolver and ascend, or I shall remain here for good!"

She swung her legs about and was rewarded by feeling a ledge to the right side of her; in a moment she was standing on it, holding the rope gingerly as a slight support. She unhooked from her belt a small acetylene lamp, but to light it she was forced to release her hold on the rope and seat herself on the ledge, with her feet in the water. In less than a minute she had the lamp alight, showing a bright glare wherever she directed its rays.

There was no trace of a weapon on the ledge which, as she could now see, ran along the side and round to the opposite end of the well, where a hollow cavity, big enough for two persons had been scooped out either by the hand of man or the action of the water.

"That will be a far better position from which to make a search!" she cried joyfully. "I must get there!"

It was not a matter of much difficulty to shuffle round to that side. There she was able to lie nearly flat on her face and grope about in the water with her right hand. She felt the bottom; there was only a foot of water—if the loathsome

The Wisdom of Gladstone.

The late Mr. Gladstone used frequently to remark how careless his friend, John Bright, was of his health. It was generally believed that Mr. Bright never sought medical advice; but this was not quite correct, for the great Liberal orator one day astonished Sir Andrew Clark with his presence in that well-known physician's consulting room.

And yet Mr. Bright lived to be seventy-eight; so that we see, in spite of his alleged carelessness in matters of health, he lived to be an old man, and overlapped the average term of life. Mr. Gladstone almost climbed up into the nineties—but then Mr. Gladstone was all his life keenly watchful of his health and wisely safeguarded it. Even if Mr. Bright had made a better record than Mr. Gladstone, still the latter's practice would have been right and the former's wrong. It is the general average that tells the story.

In the autumn of 1889 (the year Mr. Bright died) Mrs. M. A. Bathurst, of Yelden, Higham Ferrers, began to realise that her health was failing. She felt low and weak without knowing why. She lost all relish for food, and often after her meagre meals endured much pain at the chest and sides, a tendency which increased until eating changed from a pleasure to a dreaded necessity. After a year this misery was intensified by an attack of acute rheumatism. "My legs, ankles, and knees were stiff and painful, and the joints swollen," wrote Mrs. Bathurst on October 5th, 1898, "so that I had great difficulty in getting about. I tried many medicines, internal and external, but obtained no more than slight temporary relief from the best of them until my attention was called to Mother Seigel's Syrup. That remedy completely rid me both of indigestion and rheumatism, so that I now live and work in comfort."

As it is sometimes alleged against rapid cures that their good effects are not lasting, we would again refer to the case of Mrs. Bathurst in proof that, however true this may be of many other medicines, it is certainly not true of Mother Seigel's Syrup. "Six years have now passed," writes Mrs. Bathurst, on March 24th, 1904, "since I was cured of indigestion and rheumatism by Mother Seigel's Syrup, and there has been no return of either complaint. My appetite is good, and I have no need to exercise special care as to what I eat. In fact, my general health is excellent, though I still take a dose of the Syrup now and again as a safeguard against a return of the rheumatism."

Mrs. Bathurst's precaution would have commended itself to Mr. Gladstone, who, in matters of health, would leave nothing to chance.

INDIGESTION

AND SLEEPLESSNESS

"Indigestion reduced me from a strong, healthy man almost to a shadow," says Mr. Alfred Clapham, of Windmill Lane, Cheshunt.

Dispelled by

"There was always a feeling of oppression at my stomach; and I suffered much from headache, want of appetite, and sleeplessness. From this wretched condition Mother Seigel's Syrup rescued me, after numerous other medicines had failed."

MOTHER

SEIGEL'S SYRUP.

Price 1/1½ and 2/6 per Bottle.

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fluid could be so called !—in the well, and she was able to pass her hand over the greater part of the bed.

Nevertheless, the search was a long one ; she had to crawl along the ledge on hands and knees and place herself in several awkward positions before she could be sure that she had groped over the whole of the bottom of the well. She was feeling faint from the odour, and still no result !

It often happens that, just as we are giving up in despair, we attain our object ; it was so with Macie. Her hand struck something at the very moment that she was withdrawing it from the water after the final attempt. She drew it forth and saw a neat six-chambered revolver !

" Are there any marks on it ? " she asked herself.

Quickly she examined it in the bright light of the lamp. She uttered an exclamation of surprise and disappointment ; the revolver bore the initials of John Poole ! His own revolver had been taken from him and used against him ! This weapon afforded no clue to the would-be murderer ! Unless John Poole spoke, Basil Cartwright might suffer, and there was no certainty even that Poole could have recognised his assailant !

" The man he brushed against in the darkness must be the man who threw this in here," she murmured. " But who was it ? In the absence of Poole's evidence, Basil Cartwright will be regarded as the perpetrator. Oh, if I could find out who it was ! "

Had she been able to pierce the darkness which veiled the mouth of the well, she would have seen that man peering down at her, an evil light on his face. He was invisible to her, while he could see a figure with a lamp in the depths without being able to recognise it.

Macie hooked the lamp, still burning, to her belt and, gripping the rope, began the ascent. The fateful weapon was stuck securely in her belt close to the lamp, and the evil-faced man at the top saw it as she came nearer and nearer to the outer world. He smothered a horrible oath and drew a large jack knife, with a formidable blade, from an inner pocket.

" I ain't going to have no meddling with my business ! " he muttered savagely. " I don't want to send any more people home afore their time, but this one has got to go ! "

Leaning over the mouth of the well, he cried down it in a brutal tone :

" You needn't trouble to climb any higher, 'cos you're going down again, sharp ! I'm going to cut the rope, and serve you right for interfering ! I come here to get the swag, and I heerd yer down there. Well, down yer go again ! "

He slashed at the rope and his knife cut it through at the second slash. He chuckled fiendishly as he heard the fall, after which he listened intently for a while. It seemed to him that he waited five minutes, but it was in reality scarcely one. He heard nothing, he could see nothing ; satisfied that his work was well done, he moved off, muttering that he would leave the swag there for another day, as it would be safer not to have it in his possession.

And what had happened in the old well? Macie's heart had stood still with horror on hearing the voice, which she recognised as that of a suspicious character in the neighbourhood ; then the exact position flashed upon her mind and she slid down the rope again with alacrity. If the rascal had cut through the rope at the first slash, Macie would have been killed, but the short interval between the two slashes saved her ; she was near the bottom when the rope was severed and she fell into the water. Her lamp knocked against the ledge, and that was the noise heard by the man at the top.

Macie clutched the ledge and remained quiet, lest the ruffian should hurl something down on her. She waited for several minutes before daring to move, but at the expiration of that time she dragged herself to the cavity at the side and scrambled on it.

She was in darkness, the lower half of her body was drenched and she was helpless at the bottom of the well. What hope was there for her ? She might lie there and die ! She had been foolish to undertake such a task ! Yet, no ! As she lay there she understood why she had done it ; she loved Basil Cartwright and if he were to die—— But what was life to her in any case ? Marriage with Poole would be odious ; he had forced her to this engagement by the unmanly use of a threat to reveal what was only a tomboyish piece of fun but which might prejudice her in the eyes of others if it were made known in the manner hinted at by Poole ! She detested him, but she had been frightened into it. She blamed herself now for not having had more courage. And if Poole died ?

For a moment the idea seemed to give her pleasure ; she was only human, and it must be remembered that Poole had treated her shamefully by using this threat to tarnish her name ! However, she crowded back the unworthy thought, and she also remembered that Poole's death might be Basil's undoing.

" I must get out of this ! " she cried desperately. " Poole must live and he must say who his assailant was. He will know ! I am sure that Basil is innocent ; this adventure proves it, and I will use my influence over Poole if he once recovers consciousness ! "

Macie had found a piece of iron hooping, and with this she began to scoop out hand and foot holes in the side of the well-shaft. This was far more easy than she had anticipated, and she made good progress. She often had to descend to the ledge and rest, and she had to tie a handkerchief round her mouth and nostrils to insure air of slightly greater purity ; but at last, after working nearly all night, she was able to grasp the top of the wall at the mouth and drag herself out.

She lay on the ground near the well for nearly an hour, recovering strength ; it was daylight. As she rose to her feet she touched a paper, and an examination showed that it must have been dragged from the miscreant's pocket when he pulled out his knife. That paper made her brain reel, for on it were written a few lines which proved that John Poole and this ruffian, Dennis Carter, were in league and that they were the authors of the burglaries committed in the district !

She saw it all ! By reason of his social position, Poole could get the desired information and plans of houses ; in fact, more than one burglary had been committed while he was a guest at the house ! His income was largely derived from the proceeds of these robberies ! Carter was his tool, and they had probably quarrelled over the division of the booty. Carter had wrested the revolver from Poole and shot him ; he, Carter, had thrown the weapon down the well and had hidden the " swag " near by, but in some way he had dropped that pearl close to O'Grady's cottage !

Notwithstanding her condition, Macie went straight to the police headquarters and lodged her information ; even while the inspector was wondering whether it could all be true or Macie was suffering from mental derangement, a messenger brought the further information that Poole had recovered consciousness sufficiently to make a brief statement ; that statement was rather disconnected, but it confirmed Macie's story.

" Thank Heaven ! " cried Macie, and then she fainted.

The denouement followed quickly. A police officer hunted for the swag in the clump of bushes and found it. Carter was arrested and Basil Cartwright released. Poole having relapsed into insensibility again, died two days later without ever recovering consciousness again.

Carter was sentenced to a long term of penal servitude for manslaughter, for his counsel contended that he had shot the other in a struggle and without premeditation. Macie was the heroine of the town, and when she married Basil Cartwright the inhabitants made a general holiday of the wedding day.

G. Brewster.

She : " But if you say you can't bear the girl, why did you propose ? " He : " Well, her people have always been awfully good to me, and it's the only way I could return their hospitality."

" Do you believe," a lady asked, " that a genius can possibly be a good husband ? " " Well," was the modest reply, " I would prefer not to answer that question, but my wife ought to be able to tell you ! "

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Conducted by CYNTHIA.

[In this page are answered any letters from readers dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, or points of etiquette. All communications must be addressed to Miss Cynthia Hamilton, c/o the Editor of SHORT STORIES.*]*

Seeing a Lady Home.

THERE is no offence, whatever, "A. J. S. W.," in your seeing a young lady home, and, therefore, nothing to apologise about. The surest way to admit that you have done wrong would be to send such an apology, whereas your position should be that you have merely acted in a courteous way. If you have been in the habit of seeing her home rather too regularly, then, perhaps it is time you ceased to do so, as her parents do not seem to approve. Above all, do not get her into trouble over it.

Impressing Her Parents.

So, "EDWARD," you want to know the best way to make a good impression on your *fiancée's* parents on visiting them for the first time shortly. Of course, I shall be most happy to aid you. You say there is a father and mother, and several children, boys and girls ranging from twenty to two. Well, first of all, lay yourself out to make a good impression on the mother. This you will do in several ways. Let her see how devoted you are to the youngest child—the baby—and play a little with it, even if it does involve some loss of self-respect. Help mother lay the tea-table, and also, if necessary, to remove its contents after the meal. Cut the bread, hand the tea-cups, and pass things nicely. Manners are the first things an average mother looks at in a strange young man.

* * * * *

Having won the good graces of mother, give a look at father. Find out in what he is specially interested. If it is bagatelle, or whist, make out that it is one of your favourite hobbies, and implore him to give you a game. If you are wise you will contrive to let papa just beat you, after an exciting struggle. Don't play too well. If father gardens, you go and do a bit of gardening with him. Implore the elder of the young ladies to play the piano or sing, and express yourself in admiring terms. If you do either yourself, modestly offer to perform. On politics, slightly disagree with papa, but let him bring you round to his opinion in the end. That will impress him that you are an intelligent young fellow, with ideas of your own. Give little Tommy at least a penny, and be interested in his stamp collection. Don't take too much to eat or drink, or smoke more than a reasonable number of papa's cigars. Be devoted, finally, to your sweetheart, but don't monopolise the sitting-room, and ignore everybody else, in order to spend a while with her alone.

Too Young.

"A. McD."—The girl's parents are evidently against you because of your youth generally, and not merely because you are eighteen months her junior. I should advise you to accept matters for awhile, keeping on friendly terms with the family. When you get a little older, try again.

The Threatening Lover.

WHAT is the best way to deal with a suicidal lover? "MAUD" has grown very tired of a young man who has been trying to pay attentions to her for some time. She never really felt that she could love him, as her love is really in another quarter. This young man, now, has taken to threatening to kill himself. The other day he said: "If you refuse me I shall either drown myself, or go right to the bad. It is for you to decide."

* * * * *

That kind of young man must be dealt with very carefully. He would not in all probability carry out the more serious part of his threat, but it is quite possible that he might, for a little while, at any rate, go part of the way to the bad. You should save him from going even part of the way, and the best thing to do is not to refuse him with any suddenness. Allow him to continue his visits, and be as nice to him as you possibly can. If you can educate him by slow degrees into realising that your love for him is not of the extreme kind, and that by continuing to press his suit he is making himself rather foolish in the eyes of other people, and then take a long holiday yourself, not giving him any special address, the shock of rejection might be broken, and the distance he went towards either suicide or the bad might be not very far.

Cool Jealousy.

"My lover," writes "KITTY," "treats me coldly, and pays rather too much attention to my friend when she is with me. But if I speak to another man, he is very jealous. Does this show that he is tired of me? Is it well to let him know how much I love him, or should I act otherwise?"

* * * * *

I do not believe that a girl should make herself a slave to any man, "KITTY." If he pays too much attention to your friend, and is annoyed at your taking any notice of another young man, he is evidently trifling with your affections. Your best way to bring him back to you, would be to show yourself rather cool to him as long as he continues to pay attention to your friend. Let him see that flirtation is a game at which two can play, even if, on your own part, it is only a game.

Old Acquaintances.

"TEN years ago," writes "P. Q. R.," "I used to walk out with a young girl who lived in a cottage near my home. We were very great chums, and told each other everything we knew. Then I left the district, and though we corresponded at first, we soon got quite out of touch with each other. The other day, I was passing a concert hall, and my attention was attracted by the name of a singer—it was identical with that of the girl I had known. I went to the concert, and realised that it was she and no other. Now, would you advise me to claim her acquaintance again? While she has risen much in the world, and, perhaps has many admirers, I remain only a poor clerk."

* * * * *

Why not claim her acquaintance? She may have risen in the world, but if her heart was good when you knew her, she will not have altered now. She may, for all you know, have never met a man she really loved, as in such circles as those she moves in a woman may have many admirers, but no one lover. Ask to see her next time she performs, in the artists' room after the concert. And, take my advice, and don't talk over old times too much. It is a mistake old acquaintances too often make on meeting again, as little incidents of the long ago are sometimes best forgotten.

Cynthia

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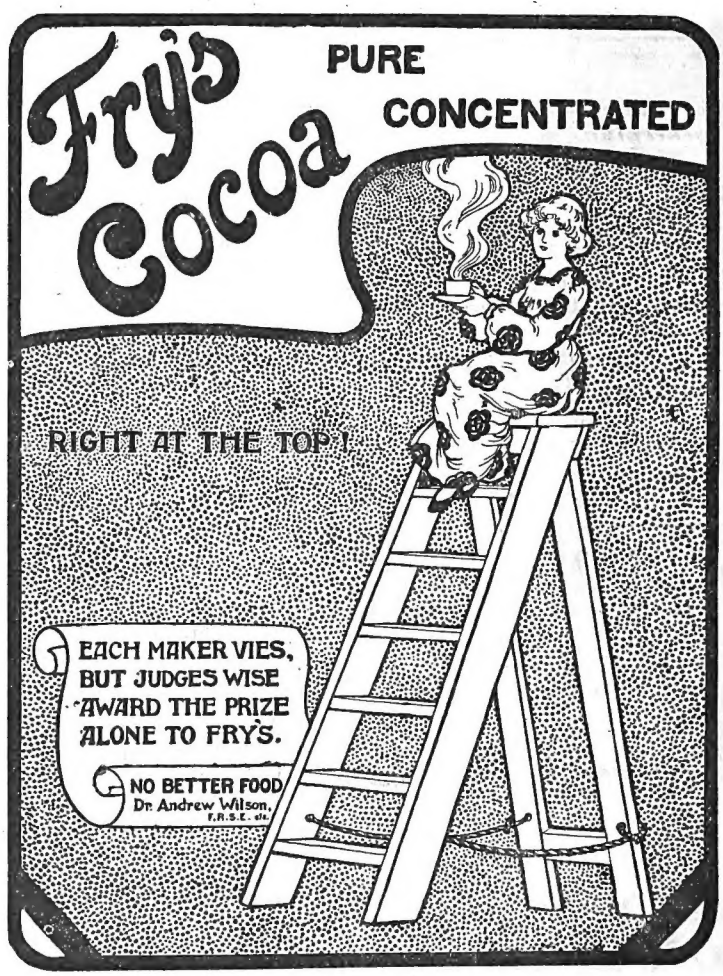

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